SCIENCE NEWS®
A Science Service Publication
Vol. 115/June 30, 1979/No. 26



**COVER:** The Martian moon Phobos was photographed by Viking Orbiter 1 in February 1977, with the photo shown rotated and mounted against a star background. This 27x21x19 km chunk of rock gives a good impression of large space boulders. See story p. 424. (Photo: NASA/JPL)



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**Marion, Ohio 43302**

Subscription rate: 1 yr., $15.50; 2 yrs., $27.00; 3 yrs., $37.50 (Add $3 a year for Canada and Mexico, $4 for all other countries.) Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required. Please state exactly how magazine is to be addressed. Include zip code.

Printed in U.S.A. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent Offices.

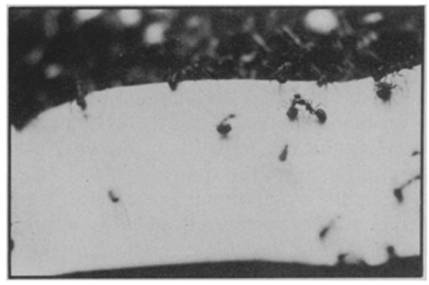
Published every Saturday by SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc. 1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255) TWX 710-822-9433 SCIEN NEWS. ISSN 0036-8423

# LETTERS

## Shooting ants

After reading the article "A skunk of a beetle" (SN: 5/19/79, p. 330), I quickly recalled an experience while backpacking in southern Germany just outside of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. While resting on a log, I noticed an industrious ant colony going about business on its mound. As I knelt down to snap a close-up, I was amazed to see tiny droplets of liquid shooting toward my camera from tiny, forward-turned ant abdomens. The attack or protective behavior of the bombardier beetle is not unique.

*Steve Hills*
*Grand Rapids, Mich.*



## Televised science

Thank you for your recent discussion of the current status of science on television (SN: 6/2/79, p. 361). I can sympathize with Jeffrey Kirsch's comments on the two major problems confronting this situation.

For nearly two years, I have hosted a weekly half-hour science program on WXLT-TV in Sarasota, Fla. Our viewing area has a potential viewership of approximately one million people, which sounds wonderful. The problem is that the show airs at 6:30 a.m., because it is a nonsponsored Public Service Announcement, and normal waking hours are reserved for sponsored shows, which pay the bills at the station. Sponsors are difficult to obtain because of the stigma science has gained as being dull and non-entertaining. However, the build-up of a regular following and increasing amounts of viewer correspondence are changing this concept.

Kirsch's "resonance" is what I call "relevance." The most personal possible relevance is the viewer's own body, and I find the greatest interest generated by shows on medicine and psychology. The local and national interest in environmental matters prompts a significant response to programs of this nature. Any major local interest could be turned to advantage, also (as marine topics, ornamental plants, etc., in our area).

I feel that a science program can be successful if it is relevant, entertaining, and has good promotion and publicity. Perhaps a conference on televised science (sponsored, logically, by SCIENCE NEWS?) would result in the generation of ideas which would lead to augmented coverage.

*Carl R. Keeler*
*Bradenton, Fla.*

**Hooray!** Commerical television is finally growing up, after a long childhood, by showing something about science.

*Richard J. Nadeau*
*Lisbon Falls, Maine*

## Illuminating psychometrics

As a long-time reader of SCIENCE NEWS, I have often studied the relation between your coverage and that of the surrounding media. Your article, "SAT coaching can help underachievers" (SN: 6/9/79, p. 376), referring to the tentative invalidation of the claim that the test measures basic ability in a way invulnerable to expensive coaching, crested a wave of concern. Since science is a constant dialogue between new problems and proposed solutions, I would like to make note of a recent development. The New York State Legislature has just passed the Truth-in-Testing Bill, and it is now being inspected by Governor Hugh Carey. This bill, sponsored by the New York Public Interest Research Group, a student-directed research and advocacy organization, aims at increasing both public access to technical information on standardized testing and consumer protection for the students, whose futures often depend on tests optically scanned at a rate of 18,000 per hr. The provisions of the bill include:

- official release of all data pertaining to test validity, reliability and coachability, as well as demographic factors that correlate to scores;
- the release of test contents 70 days after the administration of an exam so that experts can criticize faulty questions;
- the supplying, for a small fee, of copies of his or her own answer sheet to an individual, in order to give students of all income levels the same chance to be familiar with the tester's expectations;
- new testing brochures that explain how a student's score is analyzed and what legal redress can be had about errors.

Such a bill will have nationwide impact. The physicists Banesh Hoffman and Jerrold Zacharias, among others, have long warned us that these tests hurt our scientific manpower. (Indeed, a recent Educational Testing Service report, without conscious irony, said a test of scientific creativity would be ready as soon as it could be scored by machine.) I would hope that psychometrics will grow straighter and sturdier once it's taken out of the dark.

*Eliott R. Mordkowitz*
*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

*Correction: The amounts of iridium detected in sedimentary rock from Gubbio, Italy, (SN: 6/2/79, p. 356) are .25 x $10^{-9}$ and 6 x $10^{-9}$ g/cm$^3$, not .25 x $10^{-8}$ and 6 x $10^{-8}$ as reported.*