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## Letters

### Carnivorous conversations?

Given the profound human bias against the idea that nonhuman species can talk among themselves and perhaps with us, researchers are wise to reduce the scope of their first experiments to questions of comprehension ("Grammar-Schooled Dolphins," SN: 12/1/84, p. 346). Yet everyone seems to forget the scientific presumption that language is just another evolutionary marvel open to any organism that might find it possible and advantageous.

There is general agreement that the best possibilities lie in mammals with brains of 300+ cubic centimeters. But that language is most obviously advantageous to social carnivores—such as dogs, humans and dolphins—has not, to my knowledge, come into the discussion. (Apes are social, but not carnivores.)

Let us guard against conceiving of dolphins not only as "people in wet suits" but also as "apes in wet suits" and most especially as "dogs

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in wet suits," and openly acknowledge that the extreme sterility of the experimental environment may bias these subjects' willingness, or even ability, to learn and communicate in a natural language.

*Gordon Strassenburgh  
Moss Landing, Calif.*

### Heroin: The law promotes the crimes

It is sloppy logic to estimate the number of crimes committed by chronic heroin users, and then to proclaim, as Bruce D. Johnson does, that "this study shows a clear linkage between heroin use and crime" ("Heroin and crime: A stronger link," SN: 12/1/84, p. 343). There is nothing in heroin itself that causes its users to commit crimes; it is the illegality of heroin, with its consequence of a high black market price, that links heroin use and crime.

If heroin were legal, a daily habit could be supplied at a cost lower than that of a two-pack-a-day cigarette habit. Habitual users

commit many of their crimes to supply an incredibly, but artificially, expensive habit. Most of the rest are simply the continuation of past criminal activity.

Heroin in itself—which is not the same as the heroin compound a junkie gets on the streets—causes no serious physiological damage unless taken in a massive dose, an overdose. "Addiction" is not necessarily in itself a dangerous condition, despite the unhealthy connotations we usually associate with the word. These facts can be easily confirmed by reference to any standard pharmacology text. Habitual cigarette smoking and even mildly habitual alcohol use are far more dangerous than the use of unadulterated heroin.

It is reports like Johnson's that obscure the nature of the "linkage between heroin use and crime"—a linkage forged wholly of prohibitionist drug policies. We will be free of the crime problems supposedly "caused" by drugs only when we give up those policies.

*David M. Stewart  
Madison Heights, Mich.*



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