

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 128, No. 6, August 10, 1985

E. G. Sherburne Jr.	Publisher
Joel Greenberg	Editor
Dietrick E. Thomsen	Senior Editor/ Physical Sciences
Laurie Jackson Phillips	Managing Editor
Wendy McCarren	Production/Design Director
Bruce Bower	Behavioral Sciences
Joanne Silberman	Biomedicine
Stefi Weisburd	Earth Sciences
Julie Ann Miller	Life Sciences
Janet Raloff, Ivars Peterson	Policy/Technology
Jonathan Eberhart	Space Sciences
Susan Welch Gilday	Assistant to the Editor
Jennie Dusheck, Judith Mathewson	Science Writer Interns
Jane M. Livermore	Books
Donald R. Harless	Advertising/Business Manager

Copyright © 1985 by Science Service, Inc.,
Editorial and Business Offices,
1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036.
Republication of any portion of SCIENCE NEWS
without written permission of the publisher is
prohibited.

Subscription Department
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43305

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$29.50; 2 yrs., \$50.00.
(Foreign postage \$5.00 additional per year.) Change
of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required.
Please state exactly how magazine is to be
addressed. Include zip code. For new subscriptions
only call (1) 800-247-2160. 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)
ISSN 0036-8423

Letters

On maternity and mortality

In "Parents don't always know best" (SN: 7/6/85, p. 9), it is implied that malnutrition due to unusually late weaning and sudden introduction to adult foods—at around 18 months of age—is a major cause of infant mortality in Africa, and that African families need to learn better family planning involving spacing and timing of pregnancies.

Although there have been few careful investigations into African maternity practices, they suggest that lactation amenorrhea—suspended ovulation the result of nursing—is employed by African women as a child-spacing device. In marginal nutritional conditions, ovulation may not resume for many months even after nursing has ceased. The longer the nursing period, the longer it will be before ovulation resumes. In the traditional frame of reference, therefore, late weaning may be said to improve

This Week

- 84 AIDS Blood Test: Qualified Success
- 84 Supernova encounter of the third kind
- 85 Taking food from thought: Fruitful entry to the brain's word index
- 86 Spacelab 2 on the space shuttle: Abort to success
- 87 Washington deals synfuels a big blow
- 87 Africa/America split: Back to the suture

Research Notes

- 88 Computers
- 88 Earth Sciences
- 89 Food Science

Articles

- 90 On the Wings of a Dragonfly
Cover: Dragonflies are remarkably agile flying machines. Recent studies show that these insects produce lift by generating carefully controlled vortices. This novel aerodynamic principle may influence the design of future aircraft.
- 92 Yardsticks From Space

Departments

- 83 Letters
- 94 Books

Science Service Institution for the public understanding of science founded 1921; a nonprofit corporation.
Board of Trustees—*President*, Glenn T. Seaborg; *Vice President*, Gerald F. Tape; *Treasurer*, Willis Harlow Shapley; *Secretary*, Hilleary F. Hoskinson; *Joseph W. Berg Jr.*; *Edward Bliss Jr.*; *Bowen C. Dees*; *David A. Goslin*; *Milton Harris*; *Elena O. Nightingale*; *O. W. Riegel*; *H. Guyford Stever*; *John Troan*; *Deborah P. Wolfe*.
Director: E. G. Sherburne Jr.; *Assistant Director*: Dorothy Schriver; *Business Manager*: Donald R. Harless.



rather than reduce the chances of child survival.

As for introducing children suddenly to adult foods, what other choice is there? Attempts to introduce Western baby foods into Africa would worsen the dependency syndrome of these societies and probably meet with the sort of opposition visited upon Nestle's powdered baby formula.

African societies need to address the question of whether traditional family planning strategies—as well as traditional family structural patterns in which polygyny affords a collective regulation of fertility—could, or should, be reconstructed.

Ronald W. Davis
Professor of History
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Mich.

The same old song

Brian Belet insists (Letters, SN: 7/13/85, p. 19) that our appreciation of certain associated sonic frequencies of specified ratio is a learned response, i.e., without primordial basis. Why, then, do wild birds in widely separated areas (e.g., the forests of southeast Asia, the treeless plains of the southwestern United States) sing in our familiar, tempered, diatonic scale?

H. M. Davis
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Rust to dust

Environmentalists must be overjoyed to learn ("The Bugs of Rust," SN: 7/20/85, p. 42) that stainless steel process and power plants are biodegradable.

Charles M. Hart
Cranford, N.J.

AUGUST 10, 1985

83