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Letters

Earth's carrying capacity

In the letters about overpopulation (SN:7/12/86,p.19), it seems that none of the four writers wanted to consider whether, just maybe, there is an overpopulation problem on this planet. Georgianna Henry seems to think we needn't worry about overpopulation until the entire land mass of the planet has a population density of a city, as if low-density land isn't needed to support life. Of course, it is needed, for agriculture, timber production, production of raw materials, not to mention land for animals other than humans to live on, and for wilderness, where those of us who *don't* enjoy crowded cities can get away from them. Animal species are being wiped out daily in our onward rush to satisfy our ever-increasing numbers. Farmland is being devoured by urban sprawl. Every day sees more conflicts over land usage, as more and more people demand more houses, more oil, more wood, more recreation areas, etc.

Henry suggests that anyone who desires living in a rural area can move to Africa or South America. Is she the slightest bit aware of the incredible population growth now taking place on those continents, and how it is taxing

This Week

- 84 Saturn's 'Ring Rain'
Cover: Dark bands atop Saturn's atmosphere may be the signatures of the planet's rings. Water-ice particles, carried in from certain parts of the rings along magnetic field lines, may nucleate on stratospheric haze particles until the haze at the latitudes defined by those field lines falls down out of sight, so that the atmosphere there contrasts with its surroundings. (See article for labeling. Voyager 2 photo courtesy J.E.P. Connerney/GRL)
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the economic system there to the limit?

Paul Obis thinks the human ability to solve problems will enable us to solve overpopulation problems. Well, if that's true, I sure don't see any sign of it yet, and it's getting rather late. He also says he loves being around people, "the more the merrier, and the better off we all are." This is typical of the massive ignorance and ignorance in the United States around the issue of overpopulation and the carrying capacity of this planet. Earth is not an infinite well of resources. We must realize this and try to determine what the optimum human population would be, then try to obtain and maintain that level.

Robert E. Adler thinks that because the world, at a population level of 2 billion, was in the midst of a depression and heading for war, that must not have been the optimum population level. I suggest that this is quite a jump to a conclusion. There are many factors that could cause depression and war that are totally unrelated to the population level.

I tend to agree with psychologist John B. Calhoun ("Population Overload: Mice Advice," SN:5/31/86,p.346) that the optimum population is quite a bit less than the current world population (which just hit 5 billion, twice what it was when I was born 33 years

ago). The increasing conflicts between man and environment, and between man and man over resource allocation, are in my mind a sure sign that we have surpassed the optimum level.

Ted Toal
Nevada City, Calif.

A point to ponder

Christopher J. H. Hartnady's proposed asteroid impact point, shown in "Point of Impact: The Indian Ocean?" (SN: 6/7/86, p. 356), is indeed a unique location. After studying its position on a globe, I was surprised to note that Antarctica, South America, North America, Greenland, India and Australia have all apparently "drifted" directly away from that point to their present locations. Perhaps there is more significance to it than is yet supposed.

J. Michael Fischer
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Correction: In "Rifts break through the weak spots" (SN:7/5/86, p. 14), the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba were incorrectly described as lying on either side of Saudi Arabia. In fact, they border the Sinai Peninsula.

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