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Cover: This view of strain patterns in a piece of polycarbonate polymer shows the use of optical techniques to study relaxation, or recovery from stress, in a variety of noncrystalline materials. Physicists have developed a new theoretical model using the concept of fractal time to describe a wide range of relaxation phenomena. (Photo: GE Research and Development Center)



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## Letters

### Defending plant predictions

As one of the botanists polled in the extinction study ("Plants Poised at Extinction's Edge," SN: 12/10/88, p.372), I would like to address Mr. LeBrun's question regarding the evidence for plant species being on the verge of extinction (Letters, SN: 1/26/89, p.51). There exists a nationwide bureaucracy of botanists who do nothing else but track populations of rare plant species. The Nature Conservancy has programs in 48 states that continually update maps of rare plant populations using information from herbarium records, botanical literature and field surveys. For the rarest, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service commissions specific surveys to determine whether the species goes on the federal list.

I listed as conceivably going extinct in five years those species that were down to fewer than five sites. It doesn't take a knowledge of its biology to predict that a species may go extinct when it is down to just a few sites. Extinctions usually happen with a one-two punch: a second disaster hitting before the populations have had time to recover from a previous one. Property ownership is another consideration, since plants, unlike animals, are considered private property; federal or state listing only protects them from federal or state doings. Thus, rare status may stop the Army Corps of Engineers from building a dam, but it can't stop Joe Blow from paving his parking lot over the last existing specimen.

Ann F. Johnson  
Florida Natural Areas Inventory  
Tallahassee, Fla.

### CORRECTION

Several errors occurred in an article on human fetal-cell research (SN: 11/19/88, p.324) regarding the work of Dr. Juan J. López Lozano of Clinica Puerta de Hierro in Madrid, Spain.

Dr. López Lozano and his colleagues performed three human fetal-cell transplants in Parkinson's disease patients between September 1988 and November 1988, not five "since late 1987." The time between the transplants and Dr. López Lozano's brief discussion of them at the Society for Neuroscience meeting last November was too short for statistically significant clinical changes to be determined, and thus it was inappropriate to write that other scientists at the meeting expressed "skepticism about those results, with some scientists' questions verging upon accusations of exaggeration."

We regret these errors and any embarrassment they may have caused Dr. López Lozano.

MARCH 11, 1989

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