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Letters

Cautious conclusion

At the Fifth International Conference on AIDS, I did not report that HIV-infected chimpanzees "may be developing AIDS," and this statement is misleading even though the word "may" is used ("And a few short takes," SN: 6/17/89, p.382). It is more appropriate to state that the data indicate chimpanzees are developing abnormalities consistent with HIV infection, suggesting they may develop disease. It is not possible, however, to predict whether that disease will be identical to AIDS.

This may seem to be a problem in semantics, but the field of AIDS is fraught with misconceptions, and I felt that this point should be clarified.

Patricia N. Fultz
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Cover: A winter sunset spreads orange hues across the bottom layer of clouds hanging over Washington State's San Juan islands. These clouds, called marine stratocumulus, help cool the Earth's surface, and scientists say they could play an important role in counteracting a future greenhouse warming. Atmospheric researchers are conducting a long-term project to better understand the potential effects of clouds on Earth's changing climate. (Photo: L. F. Radke)

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Dubious demonstration

I remain unconvinced by Robert Goldemberg's account of alleged Coriolis-effect demonstrations in Kenya (Letters, SN: 6/17/89, p.371).

Recall that the Coriolis effect is driven not by changes in latitude but by changes in distance from the Earth's axis. Goldemberg's 20 paces north or south represent a latitude of about a millionth of a radian. At that spot the Earth's surface is parallel to its axis to within one part in a million.

Goldemberg's native experimenter must, therefore, level his pan to within 1 micron per meter of dishpan diameter. A twig or a piece of straw trapped off-center underneath introduces an error hundreds of times larger than the effect being measured.

So how does the native achieve his uncanny reproducibility? Perhaps it's in the way he fills the pan, or the direction he turns to carry it north or south, or the exact twist of the wrist with which he uncorks it; it really doesn't

matter. What does matter, to him, is that tourists tip most generously when results match predictions. And that's all the explanation this particular experiment needs.

Gregory Kusnick
Sonora, Calif.

Upside-down spider

In "Spider web: Luring light may be a trap" (SN: 5/27/89, p.330), the photograph of a tropical species of *Argiope* is inverted. All orb-weaving spiders hang head-down in their webs.

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Argiope species do hang head-down in their webs. According to spider expert Herbert W. Levi of Harvard University, most — but not all — orb weavers prefer this position.

— I. Wickelgren

