

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 139, No. 14, April 6, 1991

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SCIENCE NEWS (ISSN 0036-8423) is published weekly on Saturday, except the last week in December, for \$34.50 for 1 year or \$58.00 for 2 years (foreign postage \$6.00 additional per year) by Science Service, Inc., 1719 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing office. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to SCIENCE NEWS, 231 West Center Street, Marion, OH 43305. Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required — old and new addresses, including zip codes, must be provided.

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Editorial and Business Offices:
1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
(202-785-2255)
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Subscription Department:
231 West Center St., Marion, OH 43305
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Letters

Readying reefs for warming

It seems to me that current problems with coral reefs call for a far different response than I've yet seen proposed (Letters, SN: 1/26/91, p.51; "Bleached Reefs," SN: 12/8/90, p.364).

Although we should make every effort to slow global warming, we must concurrently address specific effects of that warming, some of which may be irreversible. In the case of coral reefs, a sizable expenditure of research funds should be authorized. Part of these funds should go toward identifying and spreading coral mutations that are resistant to the effects of warming. Another part should go toward recombinant DNA technology to find ways to alter coral so it can survive and possibly thrive in warmer waters.

Human beings have already affected the ecology of the Earth beyond reversal. We should extend the idea of environmental impact studies to our total ecology so that we can introduce a degree of studied, rational planning to control technological advances. At the same time, we must use our intelligence to

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Cover: An optical map of the core of the Milky Way globular cluster M15 shows the location of five recently discovered neutron stars (indicated by black cross-hairs) that rotate extremely rapidly. Researchers believe that these and other neutron stars in M15 act like cosmic eggbeaters, transferring enough kinetic energy to nearby stars to kick them out of the core and prevent the formation of a central, supermassive black hole. Recent images from the Hubble Space Telescope appear to support this scenario. (Image: Stuart B. Anderson/Caltech)



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maintain biological diversity, because it enriches human life and at some level makes that life possible.

Arthur M. Jackson
San Jose, Calif.

Alien attitudes

I find it interesting that NASA's SETI listening team will begin searching the heavens for extraterrestrial broadcasts on the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in America ("NASA recruits its SETI team," SN: 2/2/91, p.79). If this leads to the discovery of "advanced" civilizations out there, and if explorers from these other worlds decide to pay us a visit, let's hope the extraterrestrials take a more benevolent attitude toward the natives than did the Europeans who followed up on Columbus' discovery.

Michael Valentine
Lexington, Va.

Charcoal: Neither beauty nor beast

In stating that "the fullerites join diamond and graphite as the third material form of carbon atoms" ("C₆₀: Definitely a beauty,

maybe a beast," SN: 1/26/91, p.54), you neglect to include charcoal as a form of carbon. Charcoal is pure carbon but lacks the structured crystalline pattern of diamond and graphite. We use it more and more in clinical medicine as an antidote for poisoning, to absorb odors and toxic by-products in infected wounds, to reduce bilirubin in cases of jaundice of the newborn, to relieve bad breath, to remove fruit stains from teeth and to treat nausea and vomiting. Charcoal is the treatment of choice for traveler's diarrhea and is the most effective product to relieve intestinal gas. It has no unwanted side effects, and one positively cannot overdose on it.

Agatha M. Thrash
Preventive Medicine Specialist
Uchee Pines Institute
Seale, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The artwork by Burt Silverman for "Teenage Turning Point" (SN: 3/23/91, p.184), including the cover illustration, originally appeared in the winter/spring 1990 CARNEGIE QUARTERLY.

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