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Cover: This native Hawaiian tree snail, *Achatinella mustelina*, looks like lunch to a species of imported carnivorous snail now sweeping Hawaii. Alien species such as the carnivorous snail, African grasses, feral pigs, and yellow-jacket wasps are causing ecological trouble in the island paradise.  
(Photo: Michael G. Hadfield, Kewalo Marine Laboratory, Honolulu)



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**Science Service**, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921, gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Program it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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## Letters

### We blue it

Your photograph of the *Commelina* sp. accompanying the cover story "True Blue" (SN: 9/19/92, p.184) is upside down. In those species of *Commelina* with dimorphic blue and white petals, the two large (lateral) blue petals are uppermost, with the reduced (median) white petal below.



Albert F. W. Vick/Natl. Wildflower Res. Ctr.

Wendy B. Zomlefer  
Florida Museum of Natural History  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Fla.

### The world viewed askew

In the last sentence of "The Warped World of Mental Maps" (SN: 10/3/92, p.222), the author asks, "... who would think to question whether

a map on the wall depicts Earth's continents as they truly are?" My answer is, "Anyone who does not believe that the world is flat."

Only in R. Buckminster Fuller's icosahedral projection (in which he projects the features of the globe onto a concentric icosahedron, whose 20 equilateral triangles are then reassembled in a certain way on a flat surface) are the shapes and relative sizes of the continents accurately represented. Alas, this effect is achieved at the expense of an accurate indication of their relative positions, which most mapmakers (and map users) would consider more important.

Saarinen instructed the subjects to concentrate on "countries or features they considered important," which they apparently did. This, and the fact that the subjects were not selected for their drawing skills, seriously weakens the conclusion that they displayed ignorance about geography. Had they been specifically asked, "Which is larger, Europe or Africa?" the majority may well have answered "Africa."

Does Reginald G. Gollidge really mean to imply that a country's set of closest trading

partners is determined by mental impressions of their relative sizes? If this were the case, I'd expect to see us doing much more trade with Greenland than with Japan.

Jeffry D. Mueller  
Eldersburg, Md.

**Saarinen reports asking** subjects to draw a map of the world on a flat sheet of paper. Since it is mathematically impossible to do so accurately, he should not have been surprised when they failed.

A flat map can show the areas of the land masses in their proper relationship only at the cost of severe distortion of their shapes or positions, or both. Saarinen may consider it obvious that area is the most important criterion, but unless the subjects in this experiment were specifically so instructed, he should not assume that they thought the same way.

Undoubtedly, cultural bias does influence how we see the world, and probably few people consciously chose one projection over an-

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