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Letters

Fossil evidence of oxygen?

The morphological structure of the bacteria embedded in amber ("Amber-trapped creatures show timeless form," SN: 1/6/93, p.39) is simply further evidence that by 220 million years ago the atmosphere was well oxygenated. I have read articles and seen photographs of modern-day bacteria purportedly grown in oxygen-free environments. What I saw in these photographs looked like diatoms with no cell wall. The accompanying articles also said that these were modern bacteria with no cell wall and concluded that cell walls constitute a defense against the poisonous effects of too much oxygen.

Jay Frederick Ransom
Oxnard, Calif.

An extinct tree fern is identified with the generic name *Pterophyllum*. Is it possible that *P. jaegeri* (the tree fern) and *P. scalare* (the

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Cover: Immediately after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, rescue teams transported several hundred sea otters to makeshift rehabilitation centers; this pair is seen recuperating at the Little Jakobof facility. While the \$18 million effort yielded valuable information on the otter's high vulnerability to oil, it also raised important questions about whether rescue policies should be changed. (Photo: Doug Loshbaugh)



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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It 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 Programs 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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angelfish) are that closely related? *P. scalare* has been so classified since 1840. Has the fish been given a new Latin name?

Donald Chandler
Lincoln, Calif

"Ptero" refers to the wing-like physical features shared by the leaves of the tree fern and the fins of the angelfish. They are not evolutionarily related, though.

— D. Pendick

Avoiding formula in the first place

"Toxic 'fats' in preemie supplement" (SN: 1/30/93, p.78) brings up an important cultural and scientific point. While the Japanese have the world's lowest infant mortality rate, the U.S. ranks 23rd, worldwide, in infant mortality.

One reason for this difference is that the Japanese recognize the unique health-enhancing properties of breast milk. Americans continue to pour millions of dollars down a research rathole, trying to discover formula

that is "just as good as" breast milk, while babies continue to die unnecessarily.

If U.S. government money, especially WIC [Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children] funds, went toward promoting breast feeding and if WHO-UNICEF guidelines for "baby-friendly" hospitals became a federal standard, our third-world infant mortality status would finally get better. Must we keep trying what does not work? Formula is not scientifically defensible for preemies!

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