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## Letters

### Competition among the geckos?

The article on the success of the invading house geckos ("South Pacific invasion of the sexual geckos," SN: 1/16/93, p.38) concludes that the disinclination of the native mourning geckos to stand their ground, thereby conceding the best feeding locations to the house geckos, indicates that something other than direct competition for similar resources is at work.

Having spent time in regions where geckos are indigenous, I can attest to the aggressive, if not territorial, nature of these lizards. Geckos falling from the ceiling were not uncommon and were invariably caused by confrontation with another gecko. The article does allude to the fact that the house geckos happen to be a bit larger than the mourning geckos. It occurs to me that direct competition is indeed at

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Cover: New research suggests that herpesviruses may help trigger dangerous blood clots as well as the buildup of artery-clogging plaque. This computer-generated image shows the active regions of a blood-clotting protein called Factor X. Some scientists believe that herpes and Factor X play key roles in a microdrama that can lead to a deadly heart attack. (Image courtesy David P. Hajjar)



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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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work, and the smaller competitor has conceded.

Scott McDougall  
Boise, Idaho

**You refer to geckos as having "sticky feet."** Not so. Pads on their toes give them a vacuum, but a dry one.

Roy C. Brewer  
Spanish Fort, Ala.

### The large and the small of it

No sooner did my students read the new SI prefixes for  $10^{21}$ ,  $10^{24}$ , and  $10^{-21}$ , and  $10^{-24}$  ("Measuring superconductor magnetic noise," SN: 1/16/93, p.37) than they began speculating on how still larger and smaller numbers might be expressed. The most creative solution proposed: a linear extrapolation of the recently adopted Zetta, Yotta, zepto, and yocto. Hence,

$10^{27}$  and  $10^{-27}$ ,  $10^{30}$  and  $10^{-30}$ , and  $10^{33}$  and  $10^{-33}$  respectively, might become Xotta and xocto, Wotta and wocto, Votta and vocto.

H. Paul Shuch  
Professor of Electronics  
Pennsylvania College of Technology  
Williamsport, Pa.

### A tale of peacock rump feathers

Regarding "Beauty in the Eye of Neural Networks" (SN: 2/6/93, p.84), the ornate posterior feathers of peacocks, unlike those of pheasants, lyrebirds, and birds-of-paradise, are not technically tail feathers (the rectrices), but rather elongate rump feathers. The actual tail is often beaten against the rump fan in courtship display.

Neal G. Smith  
Panama City, Panama

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