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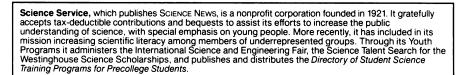
216 Herpes and Heart Disease

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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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

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 10²¹, 10²⁴, 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,

10²⁷ and 10^{.27}, 10³⁰ and 10^{.30}, and 10³³ 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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