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This Week

Research Notes

Articles

Cover: The spotted hyena is the latest in a long line of mammal species that have developed jaws capable of crushing bones. A new theory suggests that changes in Earth's climate and the biological need for fat may have driven animals to evolve this unusual capability. (Photo: R. Monastersky)

Departments

Letters

What a difference a day makes

The discovery that some learning may be subject to cerebral "consolidation" that boosts long-term memory well after initial exposure should come as no surprise ("Visual skills show two-pronged development," SN: 9/18/93, p.181). All college professors are familiar with the fact that students' mastery of subject matter often begins to increase rapidly just after the final examination and peaks a few days later. Evidence for this fact is still largely anecdotal, but it is independently confirmed by those students who come to our offices with the certainty that they could do much better if they could only take a retest.

The effect is so pronounced and reliable for some students that they don't even bother taking the original exam.

Robert L. Moore
Professor of Mathematics
University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, Ala.

I have been playing the guitar casually for many years. I discovered long ago that the least painful way to learn a new pick or other fingering sequence is to practice it initially for 15 to 20 minutes, then forget about it.

A day or two later, even up to a week, when I try the new sequence again, I will play it better than I did at the end of the initial practice session. This works without fail.

Susan M. Wilkerson
Aurora, Colo.

Nobel work at Massachusetts

"DNA and pulsar research win 1993 Nobels" (SN: 10/23/93, p.262) failed to mention the University of Massachusetts at Amherst as the institution at which this research work on the binary pulsar was carried out. The article also gives the impression that the researchers were at Princeton University when the radio telescope in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, was used.

Joseph Esnard
Amherst, Mass.

A name more to their taste?

I read with interest the account of dark matter accumulations on the outskirts of our galaxy ("Dark matter: MACHOs in Milky Way's halo?" SN: 9/25/93, p.199). The article referred to this dark matter as Massive Compact Halo Objects (MACHOs).

A better name for this phenomenon would be Natural Accumulative Compact Halo Objects, or NACHOs. Perhaps this new name would make the theory a bit more palatable to a greater segment of the scientific community.

Mel Zernow
Apple Valley, Calif.

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