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This Week

- 276 Diet Causes Viral Mutation in Mice
- 276 Stone Age fabric leaves swatch marks
- 277 Northern ozone suffered heavy winter loss
- 277 Did evolution really anticipate dioxin?
- 278 HIV attack destroys immune innocence
- 278 Probing high-energy physics inside an atom
- 279 A larger role for RNA in life's emergence?
- 279 Sabotaging the supply line of neurons

Research Notes

- 282 Physics
- 287 Astronomy
- 287 Materials Science

Articles

- 280 Variations on a Theme
- 284 Attack of the Vog

Cover: Jeff Sutton (left) and Tamar Elias collect samples of the sulfurous fumes escaping from Kilauea volcano on Hawaii. The volcano belches out a thousand tons of sulfur dioxide gas each day, raising concern among island residents about the effects of natural pollution on health. (Photo: R. Monastersky)



Departments

- 274 Books
- 275 Letters

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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Letters

Go gentle into linguistic night?

In but a single issue, SCIENCE NEWS covered some misguided folks' plans to "save" dead or rapidly dying Native American languages ("Languishing languages: Cultures at risk," SN: 2/25/95, p.117), while demonstrating the costly stupidity of such Quixotic endeavors ("Indo-European Pursuits," p.120).

If archaeolinguists can reconstruct the 10,000-year-gone Indo-European Ur language, it's just more politically correct grant-grabbing to establish a program that attempts to resuscitate terminal native languages. Linguistic science, with the help of computers, is more than up to the task of very precisely maintaining these disappearing tongues — and with *no* linguistic drift.

CORRECTION

In "Warming may disrupt pace of seasons" (SN: 4/8/95, p.214), the two definitions of a year differ by about 20 minutes a year, not 20 seconds a year.

The historical landscape is littered with dead, dying, and mutated tongues — French, for example. We may not like it, but that's the way of the world. Let libraries store these languages for posterity, and let what's left of the cultures that once used them evolve.

J. Michael Schell
Westminster, Colo.

Why are these language gurus bemoaning the loss of Native American languages when they could tape the elders who speak correctly and thus save the subtleties intact?

The apprentice tack is fine, but elders teaching preschoolers would be the best way to preserve the language.

Vehig S. Tavitian
Wappingers Falls, N.Y.

Cultural identification, including linguistic diversity, is a strong force behind the conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Rwanda.

The fact that the reduction in the total number of languages will "facilitate communication between different peoples" far outweighs

the loss of dialects as active first languages.

Preserve and publish their knowledge and outlook, yes, for we need to search the wisdom of these world views for clues to the preservation of our world as a whole. But welcome the necessity for clear communication, as for common currencies of all types.

John L. Hitchcock
Amesbury, Mass.

The statement that Northern Pomo succumbed recently with the death of its last speaker turns out, happily, to be an overstatement. Subsequent to making it, I was given the good news that there is still a

CORRECTION

The photograph of a nemertine worm and its prey that appeared in "Sea Worms and Plants Spur New Drugs" (SN: 4/8/95, p.212) was taken by Stephen A. Stricker, Assistant Professor, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Letters continued on p.282

MAY 6, 1995

275