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This Week

Research Notes

Articles

Cover: The 210-foot diameter radio antenna in Parkes, Australia, recently listened for intelligent radio signals near 202 sunlike stars visible from the Southern Hemisphere. This month, Project Phoenix continues the search in Green Bank, W.Va. (Photo: Seth Shostak)

Departments

Letters

Mercury's core may be metallic

"Io's metallic core" (SN: 6/1/96, p. 345) quotes John Anderson of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory as saying, in effect, that only one other solar system body, Earth, is known to have a metallic core. However, the very large bulk, density, and presence of an intrinsic magnetic field on Mercury are evidence of a very substantial metallic core.

Rosemary M. Killen
San Antonio, Texas

Although it is likely that Mercury has a metallic core, Anderson notes, there can be other explanations for its magnetic field. — R. Cowen

Nuclear plants outshine solar scheme

"Catching the Sun to Generate Electricity" (SN: 6/15/96, p. 374) suggests that the output of Solar Two will power 10,000 houses. At 500 kilowatt hours (Kwh) per month, each household will use 6,000 Kwh per year. The annual output of this solar system is then 60 billion Kwh per year. A nuclear plant produces at least 6 billion Kwh per year, so it would take 100 Solar Twos to equal one nuclear plant.

The Department of Energy cancels work on advanced nuclear reactors and fritters money away on this scheme—absurd!

Richard C. Hill
Orono, Maine

Better candidate for Mars analog?

Exciting and newsworthy as the discovery of 33 new species is ("Romanian cave contains novel ecosystem," SN: 6/29/96, p. 405), I must take issue with the assertion that the denizens of Movile Cave are "not tied to photosynthesis."

To produce their chemically derived energy, they require free oxygen, a by-product of photosynthesis. Of course, the same could be, and has been, said of the deep-sea organisms mentioned in the article.

This oxygen dependence makes the Movile ecosystem less valid as a direct "Mars analog site," in my opinion. A more likely candidate would be the bacteria living deep in Earth's rock crust, which seem to require no input from the sunlit world whatsoever and hence could survive an environment such as Mars'.

Amy Hill
Ashland, N.H.

Another pollinator

In "Growers bee-moan shortage of pollinators" (SN: 6/29/96, p. 406), you show a photograph of "popular foods and flowers requiring insect pollination." However, it was undoubtedly the wind that pollinated the two ears of corn in the upper left corner of the photograph.

Tim Barnard
Rochester Hills, Mich.