

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

Science Service Publication
Volume 150, No. 20, November 16, 1996

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SCIENCE NEWS (ISSN 0036-8423) is published weekly on Saturday, except the last week in December, for \$49.50 for 1 year or \$88.00 for 2 years (foreign postage \$6.00 additional per year) by Science Service, Inc., 1719 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Preferred Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SCIENCE NEWS, P.O. Box 1925, Marion, Ohio 43305. Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required — old and new addresses, including zip codes, must be provided. Copyright © 1996 by Science Service, Inc. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent Offices. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper. ♻️ Republication of any portion of SCIENCE NEWS without written permission of the publisher is prohibited.

Editorial and Business Offices
1719 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
202-785-2255; scinews@scisvc.org

Advertising Representative
Lewis Edge & Associates, Inc.
366 Wall St., Princeton, N.J. 08540, 609-683-7900

Subscription Department
P.O. Box 1925, Marion, Ohio 43305
For new subscriptions only, call 1-800-247-2160.
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Cover: A team of researchers and educators from Columbia University aims to turn Biosphere 2 from a scientific flop into a center for studying the effects of greenhouse gases on the atmosphere. (Photo: T. Lamb)

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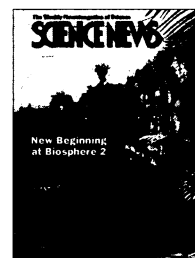
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Letters

Optical confusion

In "Contacts for aging baby boomers' eyes?" (SN: 9/7/96, p. 159), you've confused two distinctly different optical conditions, presbyopia (the loss of near focusing ability) and hyperopia (far-sightedness). Contact lenses are indeed currently available for both of these refractive conditions, and, contrary to your report, they are not "impractically thick."

Larry Bickford
Santa Barbara, Calif.

Early learning?

Regarding "Infants tune up to music's core qualities" (SN: 9/7/96, p. 151): In light of the fact that an infant has the neurological mechanism of aural perception, exposure to sound, and direct experience of its mother's emotional response to sounds during the weeks prior to birth, there is no more reason

to interpret a 4-month-old's mirroring the musical tastes of his or her elders as indicative of "biological preparedness" than as indicative of learning in utero.

Kathleen Piper
Chico, Calif.

Overpowered plants

Hill's analysis of nuclear power is incomplete (Letters, SN: 9/7/96, p. 147). There are undoubtedly many needs for generating plants with outputs of 60 million kilowatt-hours per year or less. For many of these needs, solar power may be less expensive to build and operate and have less overall adverse ecological impact.

A comparable comparison would be a 5-ton truck with a capacity equal to that of 100 100-pound grocery shopping carts: Such a vehicle is neither usable nor useful in a supermarket.

Paul Purser
Humble, Texas

Soggy toast? Read on

The excellent article about Z-Trim ("No-Cal Powder May Sub for Food's Fat," (SN: 8/31/96, p. 132) concludes with a quote in which George Inglett says you can't sell water as a replacement for fat.

Actually, the dairy industry has been doing it for years in the form of soft-spread margarines. The average water content in most soft spreads is over 30 percent by weight—which is why they make hot toast soggy.

People also buy a lot of air in their products, but that's a topic for another letter.

T. Main
Aberdeen, N.J.

Send communications to:

Editor, SCIENCE NEWS
1719 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
or: scinews@scisvc.org
All letters subject to editing.