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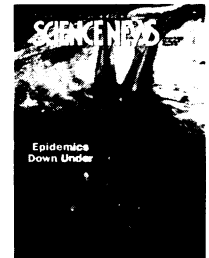
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Cover: This fruit-eating bat, with a wingspan of more than 5 feet, is one of many species known by a colorful moniker: the flying fox. Many members of this family are infected with a virus lethal to people and some animals. It is the first rabieslike virus to be found endemic among animals in Australia. (Photo: Wayne Miles/Gamma Liaison)



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Letters

Put me down as a collaborator

I cannot resist Rao's invitation to collaborate in the corneal aneuploidy discussion ("A surprising eyeful of chromosomes," SN: 11/16/96, p. 316).

Before 1950 (the Big Bang of home television viewing), not a single case of adult corneal aneuploidy had been found. Yet since then, at least three-quarters of adults have suffered from this anomaly.

Is there a connection between adult corneal aneuploidy and this contaminated, addictive visual field?

Eugene J. Webb
Houston, Texas

How about this hypothesis: The cornea is the only tissue in the body that allows photons to pass through it (well, maybe fingernails too, but they keep growing).

Over an extended period (hence normal

fetal corneas) photon-electron interaction causes chromosomal abnormalities in the cornea.

I await confirmation as collaborator on the groundbreaking paper, "Eyeful o' Quantum Mutations."

Harry H. Suber
Salisbury, Md.

The cornea is, of necessity, the most radiation-sensitive tissue of the body. Lacking the normal barriers to photon penetration, it is not surprising that it sustains an inordinate amount of chromosomal damage. What is surprising is that it can do so without developing malignancies.

Perhaps an understanding of the cornea's defense mechanism would lead to an understanding of radiation-caused cancers in general.

John William Brown
Lewisville, Ark.

Clarifying ALS statistics

A family member called to my attention "Clue to Lou Gehrig's Disease Emerges" (SN: 11/30/96, p. 340). In September 1995, I lost my wife of almost 45 years to this horrible illness.

The writer is off base with the statistic that ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) kills "about 1 in 1,000 people." In the United States, 5,000 people are afflicted with ALS every year, and 5,000 die every year. In our national population of 250 million, that is 1 in every 50,000 people, a horrifying statistic itself. Most ALS sufferers die within 3 to 5 years, so the maximum number of people with the disease at any one time ranges between 15,000 and 25,000.

Indeed, the infinitesimal number of people stricken with ALS compared to cancer and heart disease is the major reason that ALS research attracts far too little funding.

Dan Wallace
New York, N.Y.

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