

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

Science Service Publication
Volume 151, No. 8, February 22, 1997

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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, 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 © 1997 by Science Service. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent Offices. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper. ♻️ Reproduction of any portion of SCIENCE NEWS without written permission of the publisher is prohibited.

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SCIENCE NEWS ONLINE <http://www.sciencenews.org>

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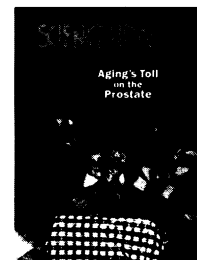
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Cover: The men in this family scene may all be in various stages of developing prostate cancer. New research suggests that hormones and a chemically reactive environment that develops in the prostate work together to cause the cancer and facilitate its growth.



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Letters

Incomparable news?

Anyone who suspects that two news organizations can report the same information with totally opposite conclusions need look no further than SCIENCE NEWS and the New York Times.

"Gulf War ills: No proof found so far" (SN: 11/30/96, p. 347) says, "Thousands of veterans of the Persian Gulf War assert that they have been plagued by headaches, tiredness, joint pain.... Yet two studies of veterans have found a conspicuous lack of deaths or hospitalizations resulting from such exposures." As a reader I came away with the impression that perhaps there was less to the veterans' claims than they would have me believe.

The New York Times Week in Review (12/1/97) says, "Two new studies, one by the Navy, make clear for the first time that gulf war veterans are suffering these health problems at a far higher rate than other troops, a discovery that could open the floodgates to

disability claims." This leads me to think that the veterans have very legitimate claims that the government refused to acknowledge until now.

I guess I'll go and check out the Internet; maybe I can find the reports for myself.

Michael McGuigan
New York, N.Y.

The studies you mention seem contradictory, but they measure different things and are hard to compare. The studies reported in SCIENCE NEWS examined whether Gulf War veterans died or were hospitalized more often than other veterans. The studies reported in the New York Times compared Gulf veterans' perceptions of health problems with those of other veterans. Unfortunately, the latter studies were not made public until after SCIENCE NEWS went to print.

— S. Sternberg

CORRECTION

The image on the cover of the Feb. 1 SCIENCE NEWS was by Cliff Pickover of IBM.

Dearth of data on old coots

"Oil seals contaminated birds' fates" (SN: 11/16/96, p. 314) says, "Since studying the pelicans, Anderson's group has discovered that oil-contaminated coots, which live in marshes, fare no better after rehabilitation, even when released into a protected area."

One of my colleagues, Scott Newman, took some exception to this statement because it implies that the coots were no better off than the pelicans.

The data on coots stopped after 4 months, whereas data on pelicans continued at least 2 years. Extending the coot data out for 2 years would be too speculative. Coots and pelicans have very different natural mortality rates in the wild, and these rates are not really comparable.

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