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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
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Cover: Mitochondria, the energy-producing organelles inside cells, have their own genes (represented by the circle). Researchers can now quickly look for natural variations and mutations in these genes by fluorescently tagging DNA taken from mitochondria and testing it with a new research device called a DNA chip. The black-and-white checkerboard pattern produced by this chip reflects the tested DNA's sequence. (Image: Affymetrix)
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Letters

In the ear of the hearer?

Inspired by "Sounds of the Seasons" (SN: 12/21&28/96, p. 400), I offer my partial list of the worst and the best:

Offensive

- The Blue Angels assault flyers: giving heart attacks to the old and infirm and terrifying small children and pets every afternoon during Navy Week.
- A mosquito at 2 a.m.
- Car alarms.

Blissful

- Evensong at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, England.
- Western tanager's early morning song echoing among the pines at Lake Tahoe.
- The splash of a trout jumping to a fly in a quiet pool.

A.M.D. Lampen
San Francisco, Calif.

You state that the roars of leaf blowers "are often less loud and intrusive than other neighborhood noises, including the sounds of lawn mowers and trucks."

On the noise pollution score, the leaf blowers I've heard are LOUD! They have actually caused momentary suspensions of indoor meetings at my work. More important, they pollute the air with the toxins they spew from their loosely regulated exhausts.

If we are really concerned about a few leaves, we can always use a broom. I advocate a nationwide ban on leaf blowers.

Jaime Hunter
Garland, Texas

There was a curious omission in the article—silence. Though technically the absence of sound, silence is a critical part of our aural landscape and can have a profound impact on the way we perceive and interact with our environment.

In a society cluttered with sound, both wanted and unwanted, few of us recognize the importance of occasionally hearing nothing. I have experienced such silence twice in my life, and its beauty and elegance speak louder than any sounds I have ever heard.

Miriam Ruff
Silver Spring, Md.

I am reminded of the debate surrounding STP's unsuccessful introduction of turbine engines at the Indianapolis 500 in my youth. An oft-expressed concern was that the whisper-quiet turbines would displace the throaty combustion engines, and Indy would never be (or at least sound) the same.

The turbines were eventually banned (though ostensibly for a different reason), and The Greatest Spectacle in Racing remains one of the noisiest, as well.

Brian A. Barnhorst
San Diego, Calif.

