



Science Service Publication
Volume 151, No. 18, May 3, 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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Letters

One-third empty may be normal

In "Running on One-Third Empty" (SN: 3/15/97, p. 162), the emphasis was placed on the reduced calories and consequently improved health of one group of monkeys compared to their normally fed lab mates. No comparison was made between the reduced-calorie diet and the diet obtained by wild animals ("wild" does not include outdoor captive colonies for whom humans provide food).

In my experience, laboratory animals are seriously overfed. It is likely that the so-called restricted diet and low weights are typical of the diets and weights found in wild animals. When an animal receives a diet with which it has not evolved to cope, it is not surprising that it is subject to increased disease.

*Rickyeff Heffner
Swanton, Ohio*

You portray human adherence to a calorie-

restricted diet as a grim undertaking. However, the prospect of "dramatic health benefits" and a long life has motivated some to attempt it. The diet can be an achievable, exciting, pioneering adventure.

*Michael R. Edelstein
San Francisco, Calif.*

The Babel effect

I find it ironic that in "Vaulting the Language Barrier" (SN: 3/8/97, p. 150) you lament the lack of funds to develop a Microsoft Windows version of the VINITI team's software. The Tower of Babel problem affects computing every bit as much as it does natural language.

Asking developers to write versions for specific (albeit popular) platforms like Windows is like asking authors to translate their articles into English. For this reason, much new software development is targeted to platform-independent standards like the Web's HTML and the Java programming language.

Such systems make more sense from the point of view of constrained budgets, wide accessibility, and future viability.

*Robert Morelli
Salt Lake City, Utah*

I am reminded of the old story of the test of a computer translation many years ago. When the Biblical sentence "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" was translated into Russian and retranslated into English (as the test), it came back "The whiskey is strong, but the meat is rotten."

Have we really improved? It would be nice!
*Thorndike Saville Jr.
Bethesda, Md.*

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