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## This Week

- 324 Dental Sealant Safety Reconsidered
- 324 Material may help batteries hold a recharge
- 325 Muscle-bound cattle reveal meaty mutation
- 325 Unusual fish threat afloat in the Atlantic
- 326 Namibian fossils reveal ancient oddities
- 326 Birds may find way with cognitive map
- 327 Protein shells out guidance to crystals
- 327 Compromise reached on census sampling

## Research Notes

- 330 Astronomy

## Articles

- 328 Calming Bad Vibes  
Cover: Designers are increasingly using microelectronics and smart materials, materials that have controllable properties, to minimize unwanted vibrations. Here, a control circuit inside K2 Corp.'s smart ski trims vibrations and helps keep the edge of the ski in contact with the snow for skier Glen Plake. (Photo: Carl Yarbrough)
- 332 The Dark Side of Immunizations?
- 334 The Power of Limited Thinking

## Departments

- 323 Letters
- 331 Books



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## Letters

### What gain from eating grain?

Reader Bill Sturgeon suggests that "If we, collectively, were to choose to eat grain . . . we could, in theory, feed many times our current world population with today's harvests" (Letters, SN: 10/11/97, p. 227).

Consider the wildlife now rare or endangered and what its plight would be with 30 billion people on Earth. Or imagine trying to find a campsite in Yosemite National Park and multiply the number of people by five. Or look at the air over your favorite city and ask yourself how clean it will be with several times today's population.

*Ted Toal*  
Nevada City, Calif.

**Sturgeon's statement** that the process of turning grain crops into meat is grossly inefficient may be true. However, the fact is that beef cattle and sheep are not raised on grains.

The cattle in West Texas, for instance, are grass-fed on marginal land that would not

support a grain crop if the lives of everyone in the world depended on it. Sheep are raised in Scotland primarily because the land isn't good for anything else. So I would say to people who argue that we could produce a lot more food if we ate grain exclusively, perhaps they would care to try farming in West Texas or Scotland. Good luck!

The point is, the problem of feeding an ever-growing population is not as simple as some people would like us to believe.

*Rosemary Killen*  
San Antonio, Texas

### Fewer natural filters to stem tides

Why "The Rise in Toxic Tides" (SN: 9/27/97, p. 202)? As a former commercial fisherman, I have a theory. Before trawling became widespread, filter feeders, massive in variety and number, probably kept organisms like *Pfiesteria* in check. In addition, the natural nutrient-processing system gave us water of high quality. Trawling has destroyed both!

*Boone Mora*  
Camarillo, Calif.

**You attribute the name of the Red Sea to the appearance of cyanobacteria in its waters.** While this is an interesting hypothesis, the more likely origin of the name is a medieval or Renaissance mistranslation of the biblical Hebrew name Yam Suf, or Sea of Reeds.

*Adam Rubinstein*  
Ann Arbor, Mich.

### Keeping a sharp eye on Io

"C'est la Vie" (SN: 11/1/97, p. 284) was a concise overview of the subject of extraterrestrial life. However, I believe the picture labeled Europa is actually Io.

*Jim McKenzie*  
Waite Hill, Ohio

*You are correct.*

—The editors

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