

This Week

- 84 Yolks of Yore: Oldest Animals Found
Richard Monastersky
- 84 Did water carve canyon on Mars?
Ron Cowen
- 85 Beavers bite trees, benefit baby beetles
Mari N. Jensen
- 85 Blood tests establish early HIV case
Nathan Seppa
- 86 How low will we go in fishing for dinner?
Janet Raloff
- 86 Protein switch curls bacterial propellers
Corinna Wu
- 87 New Budget Provides Lift for Science
John Travis

Articles

- 89 Staging Germ Warfare in Foods
Science harnesses bacteria to fend off food poisoning and spoilage
Janet Raloff
- 92 Light from the Early Universe
Discerning patterns in galaxies from long ago
Ron Cowen



Cover: The production of cheese, yogurt, buttermilk, and many sausages relies on a fermentation step that is fostered by added bacteria. These bacteria also make proteins that can kill many food-poisoning microbes. Scientists are working to harness these proteins for use as a new type of food preservative. **Page 89**

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Letters

Crime and retardation

In "Excess crimes by mentally retarded on own" (SN: 12/6/97, p. 359), researchers imply that the rates of *reported* criminal activity in mentally retarded and in nonretarded populations reflect the true crime rates.

Isn't it possible that the higher crime rate of the retarded individuals is caused by their decreased ability to escape detection?

*Carol Withrow
Salt Lake City, Utah*

The researchers cite longitudinal evidence that low-IQ offenders are no more likely than other offenders to be arrested. See Terrie Moffitt's chapter in "Crime and Justice: A Review of Research" (1990, M. Tonry and N. Morris, eds., University of Chicago Press). —B. Bower

High crime rates among the mentally retarded who are living independently is no surprise to me. For years it has been known that the mentally retarded are targets of

physical abuse by frustrated parents and low-paid institutional caretakers. My own research over the past 25 years shows that crime in all groups is directly proportional to corporal punishment history.

One could easily design a study that would compare the retarded persons and their controls regarding exposure to corporal punishment. I have no doubt that the differences would be remarkable.

*Ralph S. Welsh
Clinical Psychologist
Bridgeport, Conn.*

Levitation for burn victims?

In "Floating Frogs" (SN: 12/6/97, p. 362), Andre Geim states that levitating a person is "a complete waste of money for no reason." The expense is not mentioned in the article, but an excellent reason for levitating people would be to care for acute burn victims.

*David H. Kaplan
East Granby, Conn.*

This does sound like a good application of lev-

itation, but such magnets would probably cost millions of dollars—far more than the average burn unit can afford.

—C. Wu

Immunological musings

"The Dark Side of Immunizations" (SN: 11/22/97, p. 332) made no distinction between killed virus vaccines and attenuated live virus vaccines, such as the polio vaccine, which permanently implant the attenuated virus in the gut.

Autoimmune diseases have been triggered in laboratory animals by chronic administration of an antigen. Might not the continual stimulation of the immune system by a live virus vaccine trigger an autoimmune disease?

*Elliott H. Sigman
Pasadena, Calif.*

Immunologist J. Barthelme Classen replies: "That is a valid point. It's hard to say how many kids are chronically infected with a live virus. It's not a lot, but maybe it's similar to the

Letters continued on p. 91