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Home-grown phenomenon

"Romantic display gets tree planted" (SN: 6/30/98, p. 343) makes a major scientific event, directed dispersal, out of the bell-birds' dropping seeds of the tropical tree *Ocotea endresiana* in openings where the seeds may germinate under favorable conditions. Actually, a far more efficient behavior of our own Clark's nutcracker not only disperses seeds of several western pines over up to a score of miles but also buries them in favorable seedbeds, making seedling establishment likely if the caching bird does not dig up its seed for a meal. The nutcracker's behavior is so reliable that limber and white-bark pines depend upon it for regeneration. Similar nutcracker-pine symbioses are well-documented across Europe and Asia.

There is a tendency among many researchers to think that interesting biological phenomena and important undiscovered principles can only be found in exotic tropical locations. Yet, organisms on our own continent often have a much greater backlog of past study, so new findings can fit more meaningfully into established knowledge. There are

often good scientific reasons to work in well-known ecosystems and save the airfares.

*Ronald M. Lanner
Logan, Utah*

Counting test blasts

In "Indian blasts stymie seismologists" (SN: 5/23/98, p. 324), the facts seem quite simple. India claims to have exploded five nuclear weapons. There is seismographic evidence of one. There are two obvious explanations. The seismographic method failed to detect the blasts, or the blasts did not occur.

Given the strength of the signal that was detected and India's record of exaggerating its nuclear prowess, I suggest that the other blasts either never existed or were duds. Isn't this what one would expect when testing?

*Leonard Tramiel
Palo Alto, Calif.*

Close but not the same

I found a little mistake in your article "Ahh, the sweet smell of bacteria" (SN: 6/6/98, p. 364). My photosynthetic isolate is not *R. spheroides*. It is phylogenetically close to *R.*

spheroides, and we call it *Rhodobacter* PS9.

*Young S. Do
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa*

Brood parasitism's charm

In "Stealth, lies, and cowbirds" (SN: 5/30/98, p. 345), Susan Milius notes that cowbirds' practice of brood parasitism makes them one of the most despised birds in North America. How curious, then, that one of our most beloved children's stories is based on an incident of brood parasitism—Hans Christian Andersen's "Ugly Duckling." Of course, Andersen's tale is not biologically correct. But the swan in the story is a brood parasite, after all, and we love it just the same.

*Richard Williams
Princeton, N.J.*

CORRECTION

In "Biocontrols may not work for jellies" (SN: 7/4/98, p. 10), the caption should have reported 1988, not 1998, as the year when the mass of alien Black Sea jellies—*Mnemiopsis*—may have equaled that of the anchovy fishery.

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Cover: Real-world decisions, such as those made by firefighters trying to tame a blaze, have attracted the interest of scientists who hope to illuminate the nature of expertise.

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