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Letters

Help for arthritis?

I carry a gene that turns on various arthritic nightmares. Could this immune research ("Malaria disrupts the immune system," SN: 7/3/99, p. 4) carry through to find ways to disrupt the immune system beneficially?

*John C. Stires III
Escondido, Calif.*

The cause of arthritis is unknown, and research on dendritic cells is still in its early stages. However, David J. Roberts of John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, England, suggests that finding a mechanism for disabling dendritic cells might prove useful against autoimmune diseases, could help in suppressing transplant rejection, or may aid in combating graft-versus-host disease—in which immune cells in transplanted tissue attack the recipient's cells. —N. Seppa

Monkeys are individuals, too

It surprises me that Sue Boinski is facing so much opposition to her observations that different squirrel monkey populations

evolve different social behavior patterns ("The secret lives of squirrel monkeys," SN: 7/3/99, p. 14). It is common for isolated subpopulations to evolve mating behaviors that effectively prevent crossbreeding with partners from a different group. Only researchers' strong desire to generalize the behaviors they observe can explain the reluctance to acknowledge that a community's present social norms are profoundly affected by the historical and current interactions of the individuals that are a part of the community.

*James Larkin
Granger, Ind.*

Bt is as Bt does

"Bt-treated crops may induce allergies" (SN: 7/3/99, p. 6) concerns human allergic response to Bt toxin in people who work with crops that have been sprayed with the material. What the article did not say is that many, many more people will be exposed to the Bt toxin and will likely be sensitized by eating crops engineered with the gene for the toxin. If, as the article stated, 70 percent of the farm workers directly exposed to the Bt toxin developed an allergic response with

in 3 months, what can this mean for a whole human population exposed through their food? The human population is involuntarily participating in a laboratory test on a grand scale.

*Mary-Howell Martens
Penn Yan, N.Y.*

Dad as decoy

The article "If Mom chooses Dad, more ducklings survive" (SN: 7/3/99, p. 6) noted that it's far from obvious why mallards form pair bonds. I can offer a suggestion. This spring, I observed pairs of both mallard ducks and Canada geese throughout the breeding season. In both species, females on their nests of brownish grass were almost invisible. The males, which normally swam on the nearby pond or conspicuously walked about, were often strikingly visible.

Many scientists have hypothesized that the male's ornaments are indications of genetic fitness. It is also possible that the ornaments are used by the female in the selection of mates because they make the male a decoy.

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Cover: This Javan rhino, one of the last 60 or so of its species on Earth, was photographed in an Indonesian wallow. In Vietnam, scientists haven't seen any of the fewer than 10 rhinos thought to remain there. However, remote cameras, hoofprints, and dung are providing information about the beleaguered animals. **Page 153** (Photo: © Alain Compost/ Bogor, Java, Indonesia)

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