

MEDICINE

Potassium Level Clue To Muscular Dystrophy

► THE CRITICAL level of potassium in muscle cells may be the first important clue in the case of that mysteriouscrippler, muscular dystrophy.

Research by a group of doctors from the University of California at Los Angeles Medical School and the Los Angeles Veterans Administration Center has indicated that the critical level in muscle cells of potassium, a chemical thought to play a leading role in muscle function, may also be involved in other neuromuscular disorders whose causes are unknown.

The doctors speculate that during early stages of neuromuscular diseases a cellular defect, possibly inherited, may result in persistent leakage of potassium from muscle cells. A potassium level in the cells then may be reached, below which normal chemical activity necessary for muscle function is no longer maintained.

The doctors are investigating the possibility of administering potassium to make up possible deficits of the vital chemical in muscle cells. The problem is to insure that the cells retain the extra potassium. If this problem can be solved, relief may be in sight for victims of these neuromuscular diseases for which there is no known cure.

The research is being performed by Drs. William Blahd, Franz Bauer, Raymond Libby and Augustus Rose. The investigation is being supported by the Muscular Dystrophy Associations of America and by the organization's Los Angeles chapter.

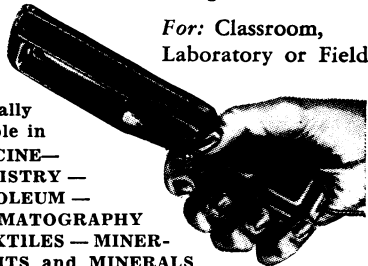
Science News Letter, July 10, 1954

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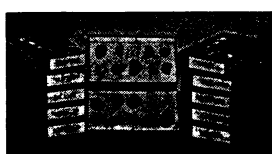
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Gila Monster

► GILA MONSTERS are among the ugliest creatures alive. If the creatures were endowed with man's sensitivity to beauty and ugliness, it seems safe to say that the males and females would never be able to overcome their mutual repugnance, and the genus would simply die out.

Gila monsters belong to the genus *Heterodermis*, and the two species are appropriately named *H. suspectum* and *H. horridum*. To all but the most avid Gila monster-lovers (there are such people, as you will read further on), both species are equally suspect and horrid.

For one thing, the Gila monster enjoys the dubious distinction of being the only lizard known to be poisonous. It is no hit-and-run poisoner like the snake. Once it strikes, it hangs on with all the tenacity of a bad conscience. While maintaining a bulldog grip, the Gila monster works its jaws, apparently to insure that the venom from its grooved lower teeth gets into the wound.

In the Southwest where Gila monsters are found, some people possibly out of loneliness, make pets of them. It is said

that after a few weeks of captivity, they become "reasonably tame" although they are still nervous and therefore not completely trustworthy.

However, one reptile expert says that, "after a few months this nervousness wears away. Then they are the personification of good nature, permitting themselves to be handled in the most unceremonious fashion, without the least show of temper."

He offers one caution: Basking in warm sunlight seems to have the effect of reviving in even the most domesticated Gila monster its former anti-social ways. A disturbed sunbather will bite the hand that feeds it or any other.

To scientists it is something of a puzzle just why the Gila monster should be poisonous. Although it is sometimes known to kill small animals like mice, its principal food is believed to be eggs of snakes and other lizards. Obviously, poison is not necessary for stealing eggs.

The Gila monster found in Arizona and New Mexico has a short stubby tail. Its color is pink or orange with contrasting marks in black. In the Mexican and Central American species the tail is longer, the head is all black, and the light color is pale yellow. This species is sometimes called the beaded lizard, with the more familiar name, Gila monster, being reserved for the United States species.

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TECHNOLOGY

No Jet Engines For Monorail Trains

► MONORAIL TRAINS swinging from a single track high in the air will not use jet engines to swish them along at faster-than-subway speeds.

E. H. Anson and R. L. Kimball of Gibbs and Hill, Inc., New York, told the American Institute of Electrical Engineers meeting in Los Angeles that jets, and their internal combustion engine brothers, make too much noise and spew forth too many fumes.

If monorail rapid transit cars ever prove to be the answer to modern downtown traffic snarls, they will be driven electrically, the engineers speculated. Electric motors would reduce the monorail train's weight, and thus would help to cut costs.

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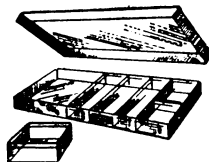
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