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**COVER:** Rhinoceros beetle—an inhabitant at the National Museum of Natural History's new insect zoo—has a ferocious-looking horn that serves as built-in weapon and tool, but is harmless to humans. See page 139. (Photo: NMNH, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

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**LETTERS**

**Bee traps: We're stung**

A brief item titled "Bee traps for picnic pests" in the July 31 SCIENCE NEWS has aroused a beehive of protest. Here is a sampling of reader's letters, including several that offer alternatives to the proposal we reported on. Following them is a response from Arthur J. Slater of the University of California at Berkeley, whose research and suggestion our report described.—Ed.

**It disturbed me** to find an article like "Bee traps for picnic pests" within the pages of SCIENCE NEWS. It suggests precisely the anthropocentric chauvinism which has endangered or caused the needless extinction of countless plant and animal species—initially justified as a convenience to man. Bees do not generally attack (unprovoked) when they are away from the hive, and one's best defense is to respond to their presence calmly. If this seems unreasonable, perhaps the most responsible solution would be to choose another picnic site!

Loren W. Byers  
Los Alamos, N.M.

**Bees are valuable** insects and I was astonished that any natural scientist would consider them "picnic pests"! They are vital to the pollination of many growing things upon which we depend, not to mention the production of honey. Beginning in the 1960s, knowledgeable witnesses have been warning us of the decline in the numbers of bees, both the domesticated and the wild types. A twenty to 50 percent decline has been estimated and in many areas there has been concern about orchard production as a result.

Merilyn C. Hiller  
McLean, Va.

**I didn't expect** anything so ecologically unsound in SCIENCE NEWS, especially wearing an "ecologically sound" label.

Why not give your readers a really sound piece of advice to discourage bees from the picnic table? Suggest the decoy method. Place a bit of their preferred food well away from your picnic table for their needs. They'll appreciate their private pantry and you'll be spared their presence at your table, and you'll help these important life-forms survive to continue their work in behalf of our life-support system.

It works. I've practiced what I'm preaching for years without a sting.

Beula Edmiston  
Los Angeles, Calif.

**What on earth** justified your publishing that nasty little trick for drowning bees at picnics?

There was not a shred of science in the story, and if this man Arthur Slater is so paranoid about bees, do the rest of us have to hear about it?

I think the best solution to the problem is for Mr. Slater to stay in the house to eat his dinner. Why on earth go on a picnic if it is only to lay waste to nature? And if this

is ecology, what a nice lesson in nature appreciation for the children—to check the kill at the end of the day.

William R. Jordan III  
Reston, Va.

**The harsh recommendation** to drown starving bees rather than (with the same amount of effort) simply attracting them away from the picnic area by feeding them is the basis of our criticism.

How can it be called "ecologically sound" to kill bees? We need more bees, not less. Spreading pesticides around would, of course, be worse, and we are glad to see this was not recommended.

Christine Stevens  
Society for Animal Protective Legislation  
Washington, D.C.

**I would recommend** that picnickers supply the bees with real food to keep them alive rather than baiting to kill them.

Connie K. Robinson  
Lexington, Ky.

**It is very difficult** for me to believe that a scientific magazine of the caliber of SCIENCE NEWS (many years my favorite) would have such an article as "Bee traps for picnic pests" under its Natural Sciences section (SN: 7/31/76, p. 73).

In our own state, Ohio, the bee population is down. We are indebted to the bee for her service to us and rather than conceiving of ideas to destroy bees, protect them in every possible way.

Regina Prueter  
Akron, Ohio

Mr. Slater's reply:

We appreciate the concerns expressed by your readers regarding the control of bees in outside dining areas. We agree that bees play an essential role as pollinators, are valuable producers of honey and have aesthetic value. On the other hand, many people are allergic to bee venom, and over 200 Americans die every year as the result of bee and wasp stings.

Therefore, we developed a technique which eliminate only bees foraging in dining areas, which would not affect their hives, and in addition would be safe for people and pets.

Our problems in outside dining areas coincide with a late-season scarcity of flowers. Worker bees foraging in outside dining areas are starving, are in excess to needs of their hives and normally perish of starvation and inclement fall weather.

After two summers of effective control we are happy to report the continued existence of a pair of wild hives that are thriving within 800 feet of the trapping site. Normally control strategies would require eliminating local hives, but the method we have developed allows a solution to specific problems without unnecessary extermination.

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