

Letters

One reader's meat, another's poison

What a pleasure it was to read the lively articles by Kathy Fackelmann and Bruce Bower ("Hormone of Monogamy" and "Romantic Reverie," SN: 11/27/93, p.360 & 362).

For months I have waded through ponderous prose in your anthropology articles (Scientist A "asserts" this but scientist B "contends" that, while scientist C "argues" the other) wondering whether there was any sense of humor at your place. Wondering also if you were afraid of being sued if your reporting wasn't dry and legalistic enough.

I'm glad to see this is not so.

*Alfred Maley
Hampstead, N.H.*

Your magazine occupies a valuable niche in delivering digests of science news — no editorial opinions or crusades, just science news delivered concisely. Although Bruce Bower's article has interesting information in it, it is a departure from straight reporting.

Your readers are probably people who do not need to be entertained in order to read science. Leave snappy and cute presentations of science to others.

*Richard Board
Jacksonville, Fla.*

I found it amusing (or intentional on your part?) to read an article describing "evolved strategies for short-term mating, otherwise known as casual sex, and long-term mating, exemplified by marriage" nestled between the pages of an article describing the same in voles but protesting, "No, not us!"

Why do we admire Canada geese for their monogamy, knowing it is not due to their upbringing or high moral values? Why, pray tell, are they that way? Over evolutionary time, a species might alternate between inherited monogamy and promiscuity in response to fluctuations in the onslaught of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Statistical runs of such epidemics might explain the background extinction rate of species and some of our own evolutionary history.

Morals aside, mating behavior may be primarily a matter of natural selection to avoid STDs and thus extinction. If we were to accept the possible genetic basis of our individual human tendencies toward monogamy or promiscuity, we might begin to understand why we have failed so dismally to alter our behavior to avoid AIDS and begin to come up with alternative strategies.

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EDITORS' NOTE

Several readers have asked us how they can make a contribution to the Vavilov Institute ("Seeds in Need: The Vavilov Institute," SN: 12/18&25/93, p.416). Make checks out to the ARI/VIR Trust Fund and send to the Agricultural Research Institute, 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Md. 20814. The ARI is a tax-exempt organization that has agreed to hold funds for the institute.
