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Mistaken Identity?

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the opposite side would indeed appear to be heading southeast. But the actual motion of the North American Plate has been generally westward since the opening of the Atlantic Ocean for some 160 million to 200 million years and is calculated to have been toward the southwest for at least 20 million years. From the Hawaiian Island trend, the Pacific Plate has been heading west-northwest for around 42 million years. The relative motion is northwest-southeast as a product of the two real motions. — *R. W. Adams, Reseda, California*

Mistaken identity?

The December 1994 NEWS item "Red Menace" contains, I believe, an unfortunate misidentification of the algae allegedly responsible for the catastrophic mortality of sea birds from Pliocene deposits of the Florida Gulf Coast. The text accurately outlines the nature of toxic red tides and their effects on the food chain. Blooms, or population explosions of algae, occur in a wide variety of algal groups among which the dinoflagellates are perhaps most notorious for producing toxic "red tides." The discovery of dormant cysts of dinoflagellates among the bones of the dead birds thus reasonably prompts speculation about their role in the death of the birds. However it is incorrect to equate red tides with red algae. Red algae are taxonomically very distinct, they do not make cysts of the type illustrated, and they are quite unlikely to be responsible for the death of the birds in question. — *W. John Hayden, University of Richmond Dept. of Biology, Richmond, Virginia*

The caption should have made it clear that the algae described are red in color, rather than members of the taxonomic group known as "red algae."

Crater correction

The Chesapeake Bay crater described in February 1995 NEWS is the largest extraterrestrial impact crater known in the United States, not in North America. ⊕

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