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Taking Root

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LETTERS

village is a city of loud, raucous, and frequently drunk tourists. The Mexicans who own businesses do rather well, but those who do the work get paid a pittance—not enough to live on decently. Almost all the hotels and golf courses are owned not by Mexicans but by foreign corporations; the major portion of the money flows out of the country, doing Mexico and its people no good.

ELLIS GLAZIER
La Paz, Mexico

Elver Exploit

I feel compelled to write in response to "Maine's Elvers Under Threat," John N. Cole's important piece on elver fishing in Maine [July-August]. Yet again, we hear a tale of a fishery discovered and then quickly plundered, as the gold miners fight each other to cash in on the last harvest. The obscene shortsightedness in this fishery is almost beneath comment. One need not be a fisheries scientist or a population biologist to understand what will happen to the eel population if the young are rounded up in phenomenal numbers before they can reach reproductive age.

If this issue were totally beyond our control, it would not merit a letter, simply a funeral dirge or an elegy. However, I want to challenge readers, especially the Mainers, to action. The weak link in all this is our state and federal fisheries management. It is clear from the article that Maine's Marine Resources Legislative Committee was absolutely unwilling to take any significant steps to halt the slaughter, presumably for fear of angering those lucky few souls who get to decimate an entire population for

\$3,000 a night. Just as with the shark-fishing industry, nothing will change without aggressive government action.

JAMES A. DALEY III
Bowdoinham, Maine

A Point of Order

Norbert Wu's photo of rock hyraxes at the Mara Serena Lodge in Kenya [One Picture, July-August] brings back memories of my visit there in 1987. Perhaps Wu took the photo in early morning, when hyraxes typically bask to raise their body temperature—before they are displaced by the lodge's visitors.

But please don't call hyraxes rodents. That name is reserved for members of the order Rodentia: rats, mice, squirrels, beavers, pocket gophers, gerbils, dormice, and the like. Rock hyraxes and other hyraxes are the only living members of the order Hyracoidea. They, like rabbits, hares, pikas, and some primates and marsupials, resemble rodents as a result of convergent evolution.

EVAN B. HAZARD
Professor Emeritus of Biology
Bemidji State University
Bemidji, Minnesota

Taking Root

The brief description of mangrove reproduction in John N. Cole's "Off Key, Out of Reach" [A Sense of Place, July-August] contains an error. It is not a pod full of seedlings that floats in seawater but the red mangrove seedling itself, which floats horizontally, eventually becomes vertical, and if successful, lodges and strikes root in shallow sediments, thus initiating a forest in the ocean.

W. JOHN HAYDEN
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Questioning Avicides

Regarding "Seeking Refuge," in the May-June issue: Ted Williams's unquestioning endorsement of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's desire to employ a chemical pesticide to eliminate gulls from Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge is disturbing—especially his characterization of this avicide as "safe." According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which registers pesticides for use in the United States, no pesticide can be considered safe. (In fact, in New York it is illegal to advertise chemical pesticides as safe, even if used as directed.) Pesticides are, quite simply, poisons, designed to eliminate life in one form or another. Often-surprising biological similarities across even widely divergent species frequently make non-target organisms victims of the very chemicals employed for their "benefit."

It is also impossible for the Fish and Wildlife Service to know exactly what it would be applying—chemical pesticides contain as much as 99 percent "inert" ingredients, the names of which are neither listed on the label nor provided to concerned consumers. Under the guise of protection of "trade secrets," the EPA allows such substances as benzene and toluene (known carcinogens) to be incorporated into pesticides as so-called inerts.

Finally, it is useful to remember that both DDT (responsible for precipitous bird declines around the world) and diazinon (now banned on golf courses and sod farms due to massive bird kills) were touted as safe when they first reached the market. I applaud the Massachusetts Audubon Society for its efforts to forestall chemical-pesticide use in the refuge and

urge it and the Fish and Wildlife Service to pursue nontoxic gull deterrents in the quest to recapture Monomoy for the terns.

BUFFY TURNER
New York Coalition for
Alternatives to Pesticides
Albany, New York

Northwest Paradox

In response to Bill McKibben's "What Good Is a Forest?" [May-June], I would like to point out that the true "Northwest paradox" is the astounding amount of forest being felled to accommodate all the people moving out here to "be near trees." The quality of life for which people are immigrating is being destroyed by the very act of their coming. As a lifetime resident of this bioregion, I can't help but feel frustrated as I watch ever-greater swaths of the living ecosystem disappear beneath proliferating housing developments, shopping malls, and business parks. Will we ever learn to live within natural limits?

NANCY PATTERSON
Tumwater, Washington

Corrections: The subject of the photograph on pages 64 and 65 of the July-August issue should have been identified as the coast of the Hudson Bay at Churchill, Canada. The illustration on page 120 of the May-June issue should have been credited to Patrick Campbell.

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