Letters

A Long Tale

The caption for the cover photo of *Science* for 23 March reads "Comparison of the skeletons of the lion (*Felis leo*) and bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) to the same scale." The skeleton in the foreground has far too long a tail to be a bobcat, and the skull also appears suspiciously elongate. I suspect that this is a case of mistaken identity; the skeleton in question appears very similar to that of an ordinary house cat (*Felis catus*).

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I took home my copy of the 23 March issue of *Science* specifically to show its cover to my youngest son, 14, who is a budding naturalist. I wondered, peripherally, how he would react to the designation of the larger skeleton as that of "*Felis leo*" (most of us regard it as *Panthera leo*).

Steve, who is no theoretician, wasn't really interested in quibbling about Linnaean nomenclature, but he has a naturalist's eye. "What's a tail doing on that bobcat?" he inquired. Incidentally, what *is* a tail doing on the "bobcat"?

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The small animal skeleton in the foreground of the cover photograph accompanying my article, "Size and shape in biology" (23 Mar., p. 1201), was incorrectly identified in the caption as a bobcat. In fact it is an ocelot (*Felis pardalis*). Bobcats, I am told, don't have long tails.

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Vietnam Resolutions

I agree with Eldon Nielson (Letters, 13 Apr., p. 133) that the AAAS Council was unwise in passing the Vietnam Resolutions. Our constitution specifies our purposes, and our members assume that the business of the council is to further our constitutional objectives.

In this age of "total involvement," many scientific organizations find themselves in awkward positions resulting from the emotional zeal of some of their more vocal members. One may wonder whether this aggressive attitude is not more of a push for personal prominence than for organization welfare. It would be better for us all if scientific organizations (presumably rational) would stick to their knitting (or their constitution) rather than flying off on emotional tangents. As individuals, members of scientific societies have plenty of opportunity to express their political (and moral) views, without messing up the organizations to which they belong.

AAAS, in its Congressional Fellow Program (Editorial, 13 Apr., p. 139) seems to be fulfilling its proper political function according to our constitution.

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Nielson's letter objecting to the AAAS Vietnam Resolutions claims that such actions are "outside their [members of the AAAS Council] realm of competence and authority." Is that not a mistaken view, not only substantively but formally as well? Surely members of the council are chosen for their abilities to go beyond their fields of scientific study, and election carries with it responsibility to so exercise those abilities. Otherwise, for what purpose ultimately does the AAAS exist? We are not obliged to agree with actions taken, but, as in any democratic society, we are free to raise objections.

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Plastic Trees

It is no wonder that Martin H. Krieger ("What's wrong with plastic trees?" 2 Feb., p. 446) feels "quite uncomfortable" with his discursive inquiry into the rationales of preserving unique environments. His work is interestingly eclectic, but it is not likely to move us very far in the direction that both of us would like to go. Let me suggest why.

It is true that before some element of the environment can be valued it must be identified, that is, differentiated from the background mass. This is what Carl Jung (*1*) called the "second creation." Martin Buber (*2*) put it more forcefully than almost anyone else when he wrote, "The sense world is only a stage. . . . As the linden tree waited for me in order to become green, so did nature, the unperceived, x-nature, once wait for living beings to arise through whose meeting perception the green, the soft, the warm—all the qualities conditioned by the senses—should come into the world." He also wrote, "All perception, but especially that deepened to vision, is intent on figure." To Buber, the artist was the supreme figurator, but I suggest that the ecologist who tries to work holistically is also a figurator who now deals with more crucial elements than the artist. The artist, through his vision, "transcends need and makes the superfluous into the necessary" (*2*). But we have been so enamored of this relatively new sleight of hand we are capable of that we have neglected basic needs, and this is why we are now forced to develop ecological analysis.

Krieger is aware of some aspects of this new figuration but confuses the various forms of rarity, lumping what is objective with what is merely contrived. His emphasis on salesmanship in getting people to accept new forms of "wilderness" or rarity is symptomatic.

I suggest that this confusion arises from the failure to clarify the history (past-present-future) of our environmental awareness. Granted that the