lem and its implications to global marine pollution suggest that he do so without delay.

As documented in our report and in a more recent article (*3*), the brown pelicans are still laying thin-shelled eggs on Anacapa Island, and reproduction is not yet normal. Nor have the DDT residues declined to acceptable levels. Aerial fallout of DDT, originating largely from point sources near the Montrose factory and its sanitary landfill site, is now a major source of DDT input to the Southern California Bight (*10*).

As yet, there is insufficient support for the hypothesis that a visit by a scientific investigator to a seabird colony can cause eggshell thinning in eggs laid on previous days.

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Errors in Mathematical Proofs

Gina Bari Kolata's article "Mathematical proofs: The genesis of reasonable doubt" (Research News, 4 June, p. 989) contains one passage which is both out-of-date and somewhat misleading. She alludes to an unresolved debate over a result in homotopy theory, in which two investigators are described as possessing long, complicated, and mutually contradictory proofs which could not be reconciled. Kolata is referring to a paper by myself and Emery Thomas of Berkeley (*1*), which for a time was contradicted by work of H. Toda and S. Oka in Japan. In fact, the issue remained open for somewhat more than a year but was settled in July 1974—2 years ago—when Toda and Oka found an error in their proof (*2*). The conflict drew attention precisely because such controversies are almost unheard-of in mathematics, as opposed even to physics and chemistry.

To say that the proofs were so long and complicated as to be "nearly impossible to check" is also a red herring. Our proof, for example, takes 13 pages (not 400) and has been used and generalized by a number of other workers. Actually, the conflict persisted as long as it did only because just one outside person, J. F. Adams, took the trouble to verify the details of our proof independently. This is the real problem: many published mathematical articles undoubtedly contain serious undiscovered errors, not because the mistakes are too difficult to find, but because contemporary pure mathematics has become so abstract and fragmented that few people bother to look carefully for errors.

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Linguistic Deterrent?

Gina Bari Kolata, in her article, "Strategies for the control of gonorrhea" (Research News, 16 April, p. 245), notes that the incidence of gonorrhea has declined remarkably in Sweden, whereas this has not happened in Denmark. I suggest that a major factor here may be the fact that in Sweden protective devices are referred to as *kondoms*. The Danish word for contraceptive is *svangerskabsforebyggende middel*. The sheer effort of uttering all ten syllables must surely be a deterrent to their purchase and use.

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