United States takes steps to see that excess weapons plutonium is safeguarded and then ultimately burned as fuel, it will somehow "legitimize" what is already legitimate! Other nations are not throwing away billions of kilowatt-hours worth of energy by calling it "waste."

Nonproliferation goals can best be met by burning excess plutonium, as well as commercial reactor-grade plutonium, to produce energy. The marketplace might just pay that slight premium for reducing proliferation concerns.

A. David Rossin
24129 Hillview Drive,
Los Altos Hills, CA 94024

■

Russian Paleoentomology

Conrad C. Labandeira and J. John Sepkoski Jr. are to be commended for their stimulating synthesis of the fossil record of insects (Articles, 16 July, p. 310). However, one of their most interesting insights, that familial diversity of insects does not show the expected rise associated with the radiation of angiosperms, was anticipated by B. B. Rodendorf and V. V. Zherikhin (*1*, cited by Labandeira and Sepkoski for other purposes). Rodendorf and Zherikhin actually noted a Late Cretaceous decline in insect diversity resulting from the extinction of older families, which was only later compensated for by diversification of new families; Labandeira and Sepkoski's curves may show a leveling off rather than a decline because of more recent extensions of taxa from the Tertiary into the Cretaceous.

While the pioneering descriptive work of Russian paleoentomologists is gaining the recognition it deserves, it is unfortunate that their conceptual contributions are sometimes overlooked, presumably because of the language barrier.

James A. Doyle
Section of Evolution and Ecology,
University of California,
Davis, CA 95616

References

1. B. B. Rodendorf and V. V. Zherikhin, *Priroda* **1974** (no. 5), 82 (1974).

■

Breaking the Mold at OSTP

Jeffrey Mervis writes that M. R. C. Greenwood and Jane Wales are "only the second and third women to hold top jobs at OSTP [the Office of Science and Technology Policy]" ("Gibbons breaks mold on appointments," News & Comment, 20 Aug., p. 979). During my tenure as Science Advisor to the President and Director of OSTP, three of the five top positions were held by highly qualified women assistant directors who reported directly to me. Although they, along with most other senior members of the White House staff, were not confirmed by the Senate, these assistant directors [Beverly Berger (Life Sciences), a statistical geneticist who also handled much of the physical sciences; Michelle Van Cleave (National Security and Legal Counsel), a lawyer and previously a senior member of the congressional staff; and Deborah Wince-Smith (International Affairs and Global Competitiveness), an archeologist and official of the National Science Foundation] actively participated with sub-Cabinet presidential appointees as principals in high-level policy development and implementation on many critical issues.

If there was an OSTP "mold," first Bernadine Healy (as Mervis notes) and then these three assistant directors certainly broke it.

William R. Graham
7517 Royal Oak Drive,
McLean, VA 22102

■

Tree Authentication

I was pleased to see Barry Cipra's "Electronic time-stamping: The notary public goes digital" (9 July, p. 162). The use of one-way hash functions is a powerful and underappreciated tool in authentication. The interested reader can find a discussion of tree authentication in my book *Secrecy, Authentication, and Public Key Systems* (UMI Research, Ann Arbor, MI, 1982) or in U.S. Patent 4,309,569 (filed 5 September 1979).

Ralph C. Merkle
Computer Science Laboratory,
Palo Alto Research Center,
Xerox Corporation,
3333 Coyote Hill Road,
Palo Alto, CA 94304

Corrections and Clarifications

In the article "In vitro transcriptional activation by a metabolic intermediate: Activation by Leu3 depends on α-isopropylmalate" by Ji-Ying Sze *et al.* (13 Nov. 1992, p. 1143), the second sentence of the legend to figure 1 should have read, "In vitro transcription was carried out as described (6) with 1.2 μg of pUC18 and 0.3 μg of each template per 30-μl reaction."