Elephant Man's Disease

In a recent Research News item by Rachel Nowak ("Talkin' trash: A glossary of junk DNA," 4 Feb., p. 609), reference is made to short interspersed elements of DNA sequences causing disease by disruption of functional genes. Neurofibromatosis (NF) type 1 (*1*) is cited as an example and is given the misnomer "elephant man's disease." Since M. M. Cohen's 1988 paper (*2*) appeared, it has been widely accepted that Joseph Merrick (the "elephant man") actually suffered from Proteus syndrome, not from neurofibromatosis.

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References

1. M. R. Wallace *et al.*, *Nature* **353**, 864 (1991).
2. M. M. Cohen, *Am. J. Med. Genet.* **29**, 777 (1988).

Response: Wallace is correct that, since 1988, it has been accepted that Merrick most likely suffered from Proteus syndrome and not from neurofibromatosis, as was first diagnosed in 1909. However, according to Richard Lewis, an expert on neurofibromatosis at Baylor College of Medicine, "many NF clinics and NF support groups still use the term 'elephant's man disease' in recognition of its historic usage."

—*Rachel Nowak*

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Phonetics Lesson

While I was amused by the description of me [as having an Irish brogue] in the article by Robert Crease (News & Comment, 4 Mar., p. 1214), I'm afraid that the author is no Henry Higgins. I do not hail from the Emerald Isle. Immigrants to the United States from my place of origin in England are not so uncommon; Joseph Priestley and David Hockney are two other examples.

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Corrections and Clarifications

On the page of illustrations accompanying the review of Ann Shelby Blum's *Picturing Nature* (10 Dec., p. 1753), the caption for the illustration from Thomas Say's *American Conchology* (lower left) erroneously included the names of species not represented in the plate reproduced; all four specimens shown represent *Paludina decisa*.