are going extinct. And it makes common sense that the extinction rate has been increasing both recently and throughout the long sweep of history. But there is no solid evidence about the rate. And there is no evidence at all that the rate has been increasing in the past century; this calls into question Pimm *et al.*'s assertion that a higher human population has caused a faster rate of extinction.

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References

1. N. Myers and J. L. Simon, *Scarcity or Abundance* (Norton, New York, 1994).

Response: We are pleased that Simon agrees that "many other species are going extinct." Simon's earlier statement was that "existing data on the observed rates of species extinction are almost ludicrously inconsistent with the doomsters' claims" (*1*, p. 43). Our article's figure 2 showed that observed extinction rates are broadly similar across disparate taxa and consistent with the rates of those whom Simon deems "doomsters." A recent U.S. report corroborates and expands this consistency to include (in increasing order of rate) birds, mammals, tiger beetles, reptiles, dragonflies and damselflies, ferns, conifers, flowering plants, freshwater fish, amphibians, crayfish, and freshwater mussels (*2*).

We agree that "it makes common sense that the extinction rate has been increasing both recently and throughout the long sweep of history," but would be very interested to learn of Simon's alternative explanation for this increase. Of the hundreds of scientists who have documented these extinctions, we are not aware of one who denied that they were caused directly or indirectly by human impact (*3*).

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References

1. N. Myers and J. L. Simon, *Scarcity or Abundance* (Norton, New York, 1994).
2. *TNC Priorities for Conservation: 1996 Annual Report Card for U.S. Plant and Animal Species* (Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA, 1996).
3. V. H. Heywood, Ed., *Global Biodiversity Assessment* (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, UK, 1995).

Corrections and Clarifications

In the Random Samples item "Science, technology medal winners" (21 June, p. 1747), the names of Department of Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor and National Medal of Technology winner Stephanie Louise Kwolek were misspelled.

In the News & Comment article "Demand outstrips supply" by Eliot Marshall (21 June, p. 1730), the name of G. Christian Overton, director of the bioinformatics program at SmithKline Beecham, was incorrect.

Letters to the Editor

Letters may be submitted by e-mail (at science_letters@aaas.org), fax (202-789-4669), or regular mail (*Science*, 1200 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA). Letters are not routinely acknowledged. Full addresses, signatures, and daytime phone numbers should be included. Letters should be brief (300 words or less) and may be edited for reasons of clarity or space. They may appear in print and/or on the World Wide Web. Letter writers are not consulted before publication.