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Cover: Even as growing crowds threaten to overwhelm the streets of Tokyo and the rest of Japan, researchers delve into mysteries surrounding the Jomon, the first people to live on the Japanese archipelago. By examining the Y chromosomes of Asian populations, the scientists hope to discern where the Jomon originated and the extent to which their genes persist among modern Japanese. (Photo: Charlie Westerman/Gamma Liaison International)
- 108 The Birth of a Breast Cancer

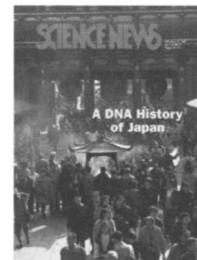
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Letters

Sea turtle chanties

My immediate reaction upon seeing the headline "Do sea turtles stop and ask for directions?" (SN: 11/30/96, p. 342) was, only if they're female. When I read the article, I realized that the turtles in question were indeed female.

Tell me, was this intentional or fortuitous?

Arnold Di Giulio
Encino, Calif.

I remember a story, its source long forgotten, about a seaman on board a ship en route from the Panama Canal to Japan. At the end of his shift, he would take a stroll around the deck to stretch his legs before retiring.

One night, he didn't show up for his watch. The duty log was consulted, and the navigator calculated the ship's position at the estimated time the man would have fallen overboard. The captain ordered the ship to turn around and head toward its estimated position when the seaman disappeared.

Sure enough, a day or so later they found the lucky man clinging to a sea turtle that had graciously delayed its migration.

Michael J. Bihn
Freedom, Calif.

I am not an animal rights fanatic, but when the target of study is an endangered species like the leatherback, can the biologists responsible for the research assure us that the tagging or tracking methods used have no effect on the reproductive success of the animal? Perhaps they just have to know where the last one went, embarrassed and rejected.

Does endangered species legislation include provisions to require something like a "species impact statement" to address this problem? Do university biology departments have policies along these lines?

Bill McIntosh
Santa Fe, N.M.

The transmitters used for studying sea turtles

are designed to have negligible effects on the animals, says Stephen Morreale of Cornell University. The picture of the leatherback turtle in the story shows a sonic transmitter that is kept on the animal for up to 3 days, after which biologists retrieve it. The small satellite transmitters mentioned are attached to the turtles by a short tether and are designed to break away after a year.

Because this study was conducted in Costa Rica, Morreale and his colleagues obtained permits from that nation's government. In the United States, most states require permits, as does the federal government. In his work for Cornell, Morreale must also get clearance from the university's school of veterinary medicine.

— R. Monastersky

CORRECTION

The report on penguin huddling ("Space jam: Energetics of a penguin huddle," SN: 1/25/97, p. 52) should have referred to Yvon Maho and his, not her, colleagues. We regret la gaffe.

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