

additional or supporting material is available in print and electronically. In a recent development, some journals are providing this supporting material in electronic form only (several journals of the American Chemical Society, for example), and this is a cause of concern for research workers in India and other developing countries.

Because many libraries in India still do not have Internet access, and many researchers do not have any other form of organized Internet access, subscribers to a hybrid journal may have only partial access to its contents. We checked the *National Union Catalogue of Scientific Serials in India*, and find that nearly 40% of Indian libraries that subscribe to some hybrid journals do not have access to electronic information.

We would like to make the following proposals to tackle this problem. First, information-service providing agencies, such as INSDOC or the National Centre for Science Information, could identify hybrid journals with Indian subscribers and establish formal mechanisms for procuring and making available such supporting material in a convenient format and medium on a regular basis. Alternatively, libraries without these facilities could link up with libraries with these facilities for the supply of such materials so that both the libraries and science workers can obtain full access to what they have already paid for. Such services by these agencies could also in principle cover electronic-only journals (subject to copyright and other regulations), so that the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is reduced.

Second, we suggest to the publishers of hybrid journals that the type of information available in supporting material is clearly indicated in the printed version so that the reader can decide whether to request it. Not all journals clearly specify the nature of the supporting material.

Finally, secondary sources such as *Chemical Abstracts* and *Current Contents* are acknowledged means of identifying relevant material, but generally do not indicate the existence of supporting material. Hence, the availability of such material is known only when the original article or its photocopy/reprint is seen. It would be useful if secondary sources indicate the existence of such material.

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Popular reaction against science

Sir—The editorial on *The X Files* made some excellent points—especially about the rigour of Mulder and Scully's investigative methods (*Nature*, 394, 815; 1998). The editorial went on: "The popularity of *The X Files* suggests that the public clearly has more of a feeling for the spirit of scientific enquiry than some give it credit for".

Although I would like to believe this statement, I think it is false. The success of *The X Files* is part of a popular reaction against science. Many cultures (particularly in the West) are increasingly secular, and there is a prevailing feeling that there is no longer any mystery that science cannot elucidate. *The X Files* offers the comforting spectacle of science *not* coming up with answers—in fact, of frequently falling flat on its face. The programme's massive popularity results much more from the decline of the church (formerly a wellspring of mysticism), and scientific rumours of an imminent 'Theory of Everything', than from a true spirit of scientific enquiry.

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Two-way street

Sir—Students of phylogeny cannot but welcome the application of their methods to the discovery of relationships between families of manuscripts, as in the recent study of 58 fifteenth-century manuscripts of "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" from *The Canterbury Tales*¹. It may prove of interest to philologists and phylogeneticists alike to realize that progress may also be made in the other direction.

For example, in their analysis of protistan phylogeny, Ragan and Lee² introduced to the biological literature a parsimony-based procedure originally developed³ to detect textual contamination, a philological equivalent of the lateral transfer of genes (or characters).

Historians wishing to search for the history of current phylogenetic approaches may profitably look into the works of Renaissance scholars such as Angelo Poliziano (1454–94). In his textual reconstruction of classic Greek and Latin works, Poliziano⁴ discounted the then fashionable method of relying on the textual version preserved by most extant manuscripts. He advocated instead careful

comparative weighting of evidence, because close replicas of the same version or other interdependent sources should not be given the same individual weight as largely independent sources. This is one of the most fundamental principles of current phylogeny-based approaches to comparative biology⁵.

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Referencing crystal coordinates

Sir—Analyses of the crystal structures of macromolecules, the coordinates of which are deposited in databases, constitute a growing component of the biochemical literature. Given the magnitude of investment that has been made in determining protein and nucleic-acid structures, this is entirely appropriate; the gold hidden in that vast mine of information needs to be recovered. But I am disturbed by a practice of the community that engages in coordinate analysis: its use of database identification numbers as the sole reference to the coordinate sets discussed in publications.

This is not good scholarly practice. It conceals from readers the identities of the scientists responsible for the coordinate sets used, and makes it difficult for readers to find primary references. It is also unfair. For better or worse, citation indices are increasingly used to evaluate the contributions scientists have made to their fields. No credit will accrue to those who made the effort to determine a structure unless the papers that make use of its coordinates include a proper reference.

For these reasons, the *Biophysical Journal* will from now on require authors to include in their papers full references for all the coordinate data sets they have used, as well as database identification numbers. I hope that other journals will institute similar policies to keep what is now a modest problem from getting out of hand.

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