

Features

Man not built for 100-plus

Humans have age limit

United Press International
LONDON — The biochemist whose theories of why we grow old are among the most respected in science says the human organism is built to function for 90 to 100 years of life and there will be no dramatic breakthrough in longevity to produce a race of centenarians.

Some people, said Dr. Zhores Medvedev, will continue to live a few years beyond 100 but they are rare exceptions and their experience has no relevance to the rest of us.

No serious scientist in the field, he said, now believes research can do more than add a year or two here and there to this "biological limit," for example, by the conquest of killer diseases or by strengthening the systems by which the body protects itself.

"In other words, we can eliminate all hazards, some inherited defects, help the protective enzyme systems that patrol the body, and many more of us will live to between 90 and 100," Medvedev said. "But the fact is that evolution did not build longevity (beyond that) into our makeup."

Medvedev, 55, world famous for his research in biology and related fields, was one of the Soviet Union's leading scientists until he disagreed with the establishment and particularly the genetic theories of Josef Stalin's favorite scientist, T. D. Lysenko.

He is now stateless and attached to the National Institute for Medical Research in London where he chatted in an office near his laboratory.

He had been editing his latest paper, which calls

attention to one of the problems in trying to explain the mechanism of aging.

Primates, for instance, have maximum life spans ranging from 10 to 100 years with man on the high end of the scale. They are closely linked by evolution so, the question arises, why does the speed of aging differ so radically in cells of the same type or the same design?

One theory is Medvedev's own hypothesis that higher organisms have more backup genes in their cells and that these take the place of genes damaged by molecular accidents. Eventually all the genes are used up and deterioration takes place — more quickly where there are few substitute genes, more slowly where there is plenty of reserve.

Another theory, favored by plant gerontologists, is that a "genetic clock" controls the aging of some tissues.

Medvedev was the first to suggest that any system such as the body that synthesizes complex products must make errors. American scientists went further with what became known as "the error catastrophe." That is, when the body accumulates enough errors, death results.

Medvedev does not agree. He believes there are built-in evolutionary safeguards, enzymes that work as repair and editing systems to correct errors and keep the body machine functioning.

He likened it to the damage in cells caused by radiation. There are now drugs that can reduce the effect of radiation.

Hawks, owls, foxes treated at wild animal 'halfway house'

United Press International
ATLANTA — Pompey was hit by a truck and Lefty was shot. Banchi was stolen from his home in the woods.

All three are patients in the wild animal rehabilitation program at the Chattahoochee Nature Center, where new things are being learned about how injured animals can be treated and successfully returned to the wild.

Pompey is a red tail hawk. Lefty is a barn owl and Banchi is a red fox.

Cliff Kevill, a supervisor of the rehabilitation program, says Pompey's chances of returning to the woods are 90-95. Banchi will make it back to his natural surroundings after he grows up.

The prognosis for Lefty, however, is not good. He lost his left wing as a result of a gunshot wound. He probably will live out his days at the nature center, a poignant reminder to the thousands of children who see him each year of the need to protect wild creatures, said Kevill.

The wild animal rehabilitation program has been operating for three years. Each year the number of

its patients doubles. Publicity about the program and the continuing destruction by man of wild animal habitats are the reasons for the increase, according to Kevill.

The program is the first in Georgia and one of about 150 in the United States, most of them in California. Last year, the center took in over 800 animals.

Most of the injured or orphaned wild animals brought to the center are birds, followed by mammals, such as squirrels, rabbits, opossum and raccoons, and reptiles. The center has 15-20 volunteer workers, some of whom take the patients home and care for them, Kevill said.

"Ninety percent of the animals we get are injured by man or are injured as a result of man's intrusion into the animal habitat," said Kevill. "They are hit by cars, injured by dogs or cats, or they fall out of trees. Or, in the case of birds, they fly into the windows of houses."

The injured are kept in boxes and cages and nursed back to health. When they are strong enough, birds

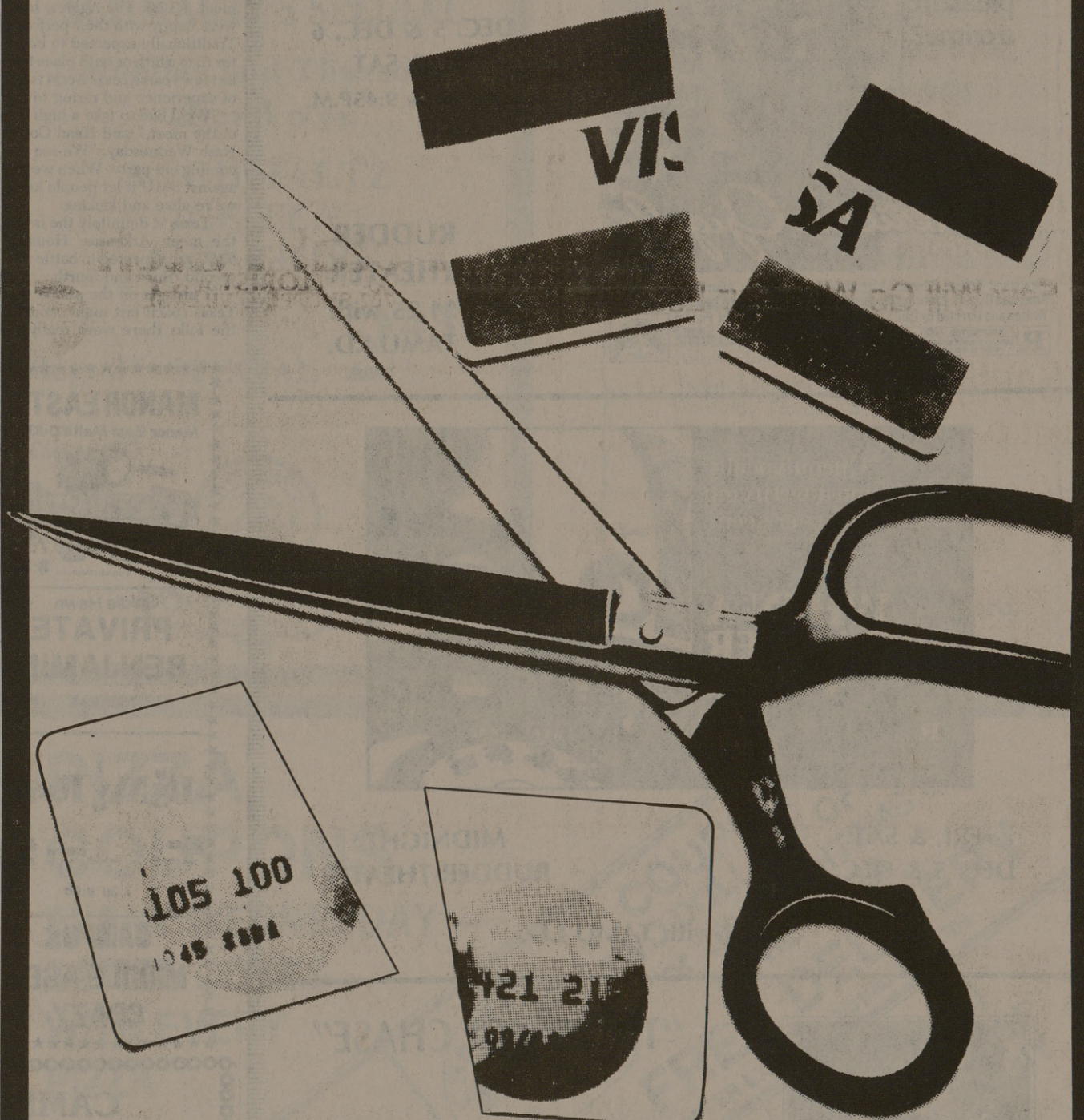
are placed in a wire enclosure outside. After a while, the enclosure is left open and the birds eventually fly away. Raccoons, skunks and foxes also have this sort of "halfway house," where they are kept until released.

The center, supported by donations and memberships, is located on 30 acres of county-owned, heavily wooded land on the banks of the Chattahoochee River. Some rehabilitated animals are released there but others are taken to more remote locations and set free.

Many children visit the center and they see animals that have been badly injured. "We are trying to develop an appreciation of nature," said Kevill. "We want to teach people about animals that live in their own backyards."

He and his associates get about 100 phone calls a week from people seeking advice about wildlife — woodpeckers hammering on gutters, squirrels gnawing on the eaves of homes.

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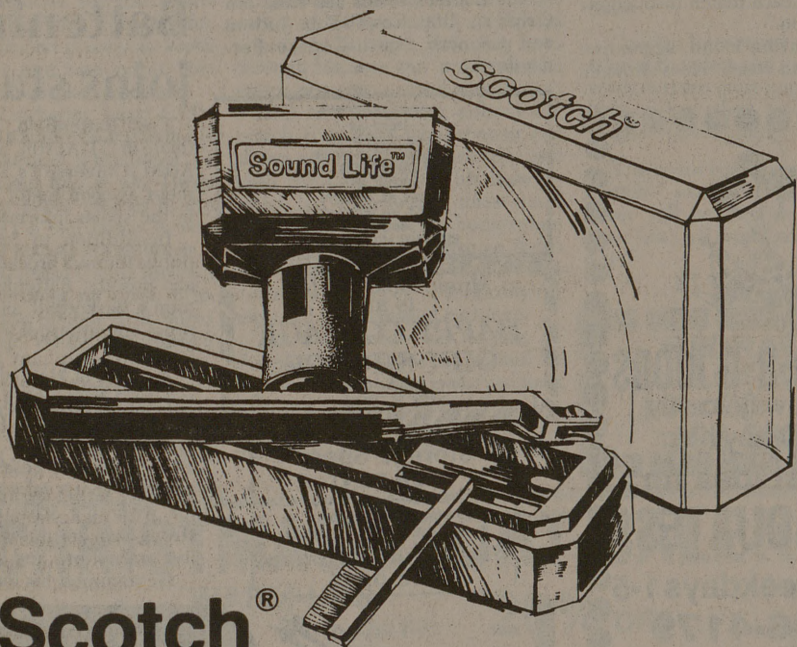
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