

Trail of Bubbles Tells Tale About Atomic Particles

Washington—(Science Service)—A trail of bubbles that tells the tale of atomic particles is the idea for which Dr. Donald A. Glaser of the University of California, Berkeley, won the 1959 Nobel Prize in Physics.

Glaser conceived the idea that the bubbles in a liquid could be photographed to show the fleeting tracks of atomic particles. He perfected a radiation detector, the bubble chamber, based on this idea in 1954.

The bubble chamber made possible the mass production of simple photographs showing what happens in atomic collisions. Bubble chambers filled with various liquids are placed in the beams of atomic "bullets" from virtually every atom-smashing machine in the world.

From the bubble chamber and other photographs of atomic collisions, scientists are learning more about structure of the atom and how it is held together.

Only Two Ways Until invention of the bubble chamber, scientists had only two ways of seeing and measuring the debris from atomic collisions. One was the cloud chamber, the other photographic emulsions.

Glaser began work on the new approach that ended in the bubble chamber in 1952. "It occurred to me," he said, "that a superheated liquid, like a supersaturated vapor, might provide a medium that could be triggered by a small stimulus to yield a very large effect."

Chemists already knew that a very pure liquid may be heated above its usual boiling point without boiling. A bit of broken glass thrown into such a liquid will cause it to erupt in violent boiling.

"I wondered whether a flying atomic particle might, under suitable conditions, trigger microscopic bubbles that start the boiling process. If so, they might make a visible track which could be recorded by means of high-speed photography."

"I made a simple test. The technique worked!"

House Cats With Rabies Known to Attack Humans

Washington—(Science Service)—Cats, like dogs, can get rabies, and when they do, they attack humans.

Researchers have examined 44 rabid house cats in Florida and none were known to attack other cats or domestic or wild animals. Humans bitten or scratched by the rabid cats did not necessarily contract the disease.

Apparently rabies is not limited to domestic felines; one case occurred in a bobcat. The disease has also been found in horses, cattle, bats, skunks, raccoons and foxes, as well as dogs.

Because a wide-scale vaccination program started 20 years ago has drastically reduced rabies in Florida dogs, researchers are curious about the source of infections.

Groups of infections in cats have occurred simultaneously with infections of foxes or raccoons in the same area. It is possible that raccoons will attack cats when provoked, but it is unlikely that a kitten would survive an attack by a dog, fox or raccoon without being killed immediately.

Small Mammal

The infecting animal would have to be a small mammal that showed no vicious behavior; otherwise, it would have been detected by now. Mice and rats have been suspected, but so far it has not been established that they are susceptible to rabies.

High on the candidate list is the bat, known to have a natural rabies incidence of about two per cent. Cats have been known to play with flying or rabid bats, and occasionally a mother cat will take one home to her kittens.

Further study is suggested by the investigators, Drs. James E. Scatterday, Nathan J. Schneider, and Arthur L. Lewis of the Florida State Board of Health, and Dr. William L. Jennings of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The study, supported in part by grants from the National Institutes of Health, Public Health Service, was reported in the current Public Health Reports.

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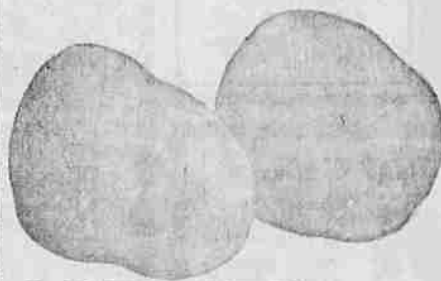
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