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Editorial

Profiles in Comparative Endocrinology: Stacia A. Sower



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In 2005, the journal began a new series entitled, “Profiles in Comparative Endocrinology.” The goal was to dedicate an entire issue to highlight the accomplishments of a comparative endocrinologist either near or recently retired, or to acknowledge the accomplished of a colleague currently active, who is redefining our discipline. [Previous distinguished comparative endocrinologist featured in the “profiles” series: Arnold De Loof, Jean M.P. Joss, Hiroshi Kawauchi, Eric Roubos, Yoshio Takei, Kazuyoshi Tsutsui, Glen Van Der Kraak, John Wingfield, and John Youson] Prof. Stacia Sower actually fits both criteria. Although Stacia is recently retired, her research productivity over her rather long career has cemented her reputation as a researcher who has profoundly influenced the field of comparative endocrinology. Stacia is an accomplished comparative reproductive endocrinologist. During her career she combined her expertise in physiology, cell biology, biochemistry, molecular biology, phylogenetics, and molecular evolution to address fundamental questions about the regulation of reproduction in jawless fishes as well as about the evolution of these processes. As a result she currently is the foremost expert on that subject. The details of her accomplishments are presented in this issue in her review article, articles co-authored with students and colleagues, and articles presented by colleagues on topics related to the endocrinology of jawless fishes

Stacia’s graduate and professional career covers 40 years and spans part or all of five decades. After completing her undergraduate degree in 1973 at the University of Utah and a tour of duty in the Peace Corps, Stacia joined the graduate program at Oregon State University in 1976 under the direction of Prof. Carl Schreck, and completed her Ph.D. in 1980. Carl was a superb mentor and has been a lifelong friend. He cultivated Stacia’s interests in reproductive endocrinology, and set her on a path to investigate the origins of the endocrine regulation of reproduction. In this regard, she could not have picked a better mentor than the late Prof. Aubrey Gorbman to be her postdoctoral advisor from 1980 to 1983 at the University of Washington. That experience helped to focus her research endeavors on the endocrinology of the hagfish and lamprey, and also began a collaboration and friendship that would continue long after Prof. Gorbman’s retirement from the University of Washington. Over the next four decades, Stacia and her students and collaborators would publish a series of articles that have helped to clarify the neuroendocrinology of these jawless chordates. That work would be done at the University of New Hampshire. Stacia began her assistant professor position in 1983 at UNH, was promoted to associate professor in 1987, and rose to the rank of full professor in 1992; a position she held until her retirement in 2016. In the 90’s, Stacia began a collaboration with the Prof. Hiroshi Kawauchi (Kitasato University, Japan; retired) that would result in seminal discoveries on agnathan

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POMC, GnRHs, and glycoprotein hormones. During her academic career, Stacia published 186 articles in peer-reviewed journals. She directed 82 undergraduate research/Honors thesis projects, 41 graduate thesis projects, and mentored 12 postdoctoral advisees.

She also maintained an active teaching program at the University of New Hampshire, yet found the time to be involved in several administrative positions. For example, she was director of the Anadromous Fish and Aquatic Research Laboratory (UNH) from 1984-2016; NSF IPA Rotating Program Director, Integrative Animal Biology Program from 1996-1997; chair of BIO-POWRE Program, National Science Foundation from 1996-1997; appointed Director and PI of NIH COBRE Center of Developmental and Neural Endocrinomics from 2002-2005; served as Interim Associate Dean of Research and Interim Associate Director of Agricultural Experimental Station, College of Life Sciences and Agriculture, (UNH) 2005-2007; served as Interim Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (UNH) 2007; and was the director of the Center for Molecular and Comparative Endocrinology (UNH) 2008-2016;

Her accomplishments as a researcher have led to several honors including: the NSF Faculty Award for Women Scientists and Engineers (1991-1996); the Arthur K. Whitcomb Professorship (UNH), 1999-2002; UNH Award for Excellence in Research in 2016, and the Bargmann-Scharrer Distinguished Lecturer award (18th International Congress of Comparative Endocrinology, 2017). In addition, Stacia was selected to be a visiting scholar at: the University of Cape Town Medical School, South Africa (1984); Kitasato University, Japan (1992; 1994); and MacQuarie University, Australia (1994). In November, 2012, Dr.

Sower was elected fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Over her extremely productive career, Stacia has championed the use of the comparative approach to address fundamental questions in endocrinology. She has presented thought-provoking presentations at regional, national, and international meetings throughout her career. She has been an enthusiastic colleague to researchers around the world, and in her stimulating review article she makes a point of highlighting the contributions of each of these colleagues. Her willingness to mentor students in her lab, at conferences, and at workshops is one of her most enduring qualities. Finally, her loyalty and camaraderie to the many friends that she has made over the years, coupled with her marvelous laugh are attributes that we hope to enjoy as she begins what we all hope will be a very long retirement.

Sincerely,

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