New Zealand Association of Scientists 1994 Awards

Marsden Medal

The Association's Marsden Medal for Outstanding Service to Science is offered for award each year to scientists and others as a recognition of a meritorious contribution to the cause and development of science.

Professor Neil Curtis, of Victoria University of Wellington was awarded the 1994 Medal.

Dr Curtis has had a distinguished career as an academic inorganic chemist that has spanned some 37 years. He was appointed to Victoria University in 1957, and to a personal chair in chemistry in 1972. He has published 120 scientific papers from his pioneering work on inorganic nitrogen-containing macrocycles. This is of current interest both in the biochemistry of haemoglobin and chlorophyll, and in new materials studies.

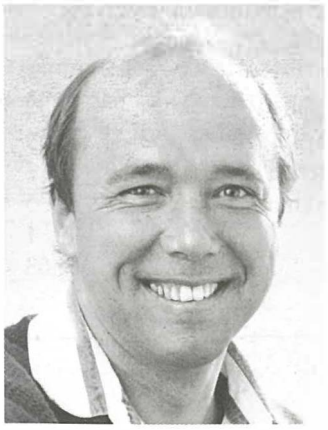
Throughout his career, Dr Curtis has been an ardent supporter of the New Zealand Institute of Chemistry. He has been Chairman of Wellington Branch, National Conference Chairman in 1979, and a member of Public Affairs and Science Policy committee since 1988.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 1975, has served on various committees of the Society, as Vice-President, as Chair of the Interim RSNZ Board, and was appointed a member of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Science and Technology at its inception.

During the restructuring of science in New Zealand, Dr Curtis was appointed to the ministerial working party on the role of the RSNZ, a position which required long and careful negotiations to ensure the continued existence of the Society.

Whenever called upon, Neil Curtis has represented New Zealand science with energy and quiet distinction. Few will realise that his contributions to the scientific fraternity have been so markedly influential. He may be described, in the words of Brian Shorland, as *pauca loquens, multa gerens*: of few words, but many deeds.

Research Medal



The New Zealand Association of Scientists Research Medal is offered for award each year for outstanding research work, principally undertaken in New Zealand during the three preceding years, by a person less than 40 years of age.

The 1994 medal was won by Dr Rod Downey, of the Mathematics Department at Victoria University of Wellington. Dr Downey graduated with first class honours in mathematics at the University of Queensland in 1978 and completed his PhD at Monash in 1982. He held posts at the Chisholm Institute of Technology (now the Caulfield Campus of Monash), Western Illinois University, the National University of Singapore and the University of Illinois before joining the Mathematics Department at Victoria, where he is Reader in Mathematics. [Since receiving the Research Medal, Dr Downey has been awarded a personal chair in mathematics.]

Dr Downey has received a number of awards, including the Royal Society of New Zealand Hamilton Award for Science, for his contributions to computability theory and complexity theory, two areas in which he has gained an international reputation. He is ranked among the six leading recursion theorists in the world and his work in complexity theory has led to a re-evaluation of the unsolvability of classes of problems, some of which are of significance to business and industry.

Since 1983, Dr Downey has published more than 90 papers in international journals and conference proceedings and he is a reviewer and referee for a wide range of logic and mathematics journals.

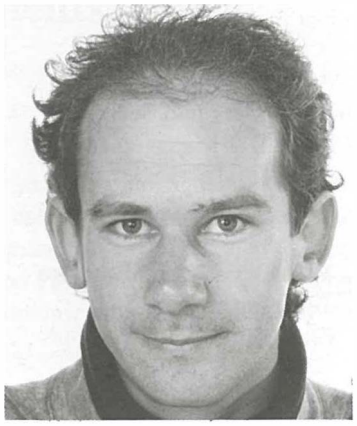
Industrial Research Limited Science Journalism Award

This award, which the Association offers each year for excellence in science journalism, is sponsored by Industrial Research Limited. The award is given to encourage professional journalists to develop and extend public appreciation of scientific

objectives, methods and achievements through recognition of outstanding science journalism, demonstrated by articles and other materials published over the previous two years. Articles concerning science undertaken in New Zealand are accorded particular attention.

Each year, a prize of $1500 and two merit awards of $150 are given.

The 1995 prize was won by Mr Keith Lyons of Christchurch, for a number of articles on New Zealand flora and fauna. Two articles, about safeguarding the future of the weta, published in *GEO Australia*, and on Brian Molloy's work with New Zealand's native orchids, published in *Pacific Way*, were particularly good. Mr Lyons is a freelance journalist, although his work was produced while he was working with Landcare Research Limited.



Keith Lyons

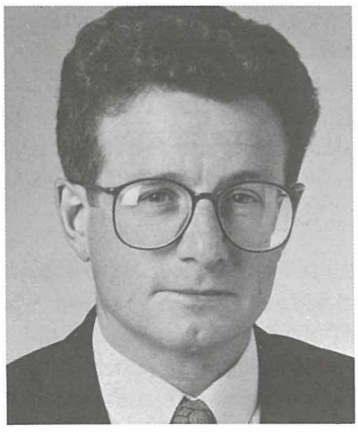
Philippa Stevenson, of Hamilton gained one merit award for two articles on conservation issues. The first, on the ecological importance of peatlands and their management, was published in the *New Zealand Herald*, and the second, an investigation into the causes and problems of PCP contamination, was published in *Terra Nova*.

The second merit award was won by Tim Higham, of Christchurch for a series of four stories on the environment and natural history, written when he was with the Department of Conservation. The articles, on New Zealand bats, rats busting, Pacific flora and fauna, and Richard Henry of Fiordland, were published in *Forest and Bird*, *Southern Skies* and *The Press*.

Foundation for Research, Science and Technology Science Communicator Award

The Science Communicator Prize, sponsored by The Foundation for Research, Science and Technology is offered each year to working scientists for excellence and commitment in communicating with the general public through print, broadcast, public lectures and other media. The purposes of the award are similar to those of the Journalism award: the development of public appreciation of science, especially of science undertaken in New Zealand, by encouraging professional scientists to communicate their knowledge to the community at large. Each year, a prize of $1500 and two merit awards of $150 are offered.

Dr Charles Eason of Landcare Research New Zealand Limited won the 1994 prize for his work and energy in presenting to the public, decision makers and concerned groups the issues surrounding the use of sodium monofluoracetate, or 1080, to control possums. As the chief judge for the award pointed out, "Charles could not rely on scientific authority. He had to prepare material which cited the research articles, described the experiments and explained their significance. Dr Eason's receipt of the 1994 award is a recognition of the best in science — its intrinsic interest being pursued for its own sake, and for the nation."



Charles Eason

Because of the standard and nature of the entries, three merit awards were given.

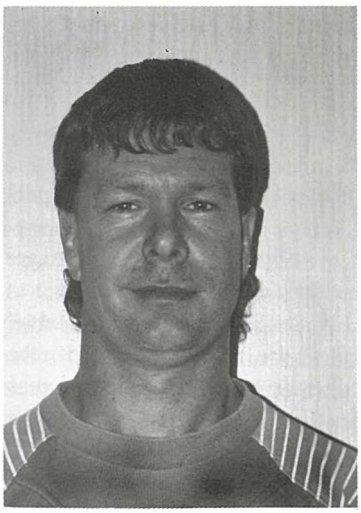
The first was won by Dr Ravi Gooneratne of the Animal and Veterinary Sciences Group at Lincoln University, for articles, and radio and television interviews which he produced or gave concerning the fish and algal toxin. Dr Gooneratne's prompt response to public concern about the issue reduced unease by reporting come of the simple things: that scientists had thought about the issues; that much research had been done overseas; and that the New Zealand scientific community had the capacity to deal with the problem by importing overseas work and adapting it to New Zealand.

The second merit award was won by Dr Bruce Hayward of the Auckland Institute and Museum for his work in promoting geology in Auckland. Dr Hayward has maintained a lively Geology Club at the Museum, runs a geopreservation scheme, and was instrumental in the mounting and running of the Volcanoes and Giants exhibition at the Museum.

The additional award went to Dr John Campbell, of the Canterbury University Physics Department for his work in organising a column titled Ask a Scientist, which appears in *The Press* and *The Otago Daily Times*. In the column, questions posed by school students are answered by experts. Dr Campbell was nominated for the award by the end users — Mary Guthrie, a teacher at Port Chalmers School, and Margaret Ward, who teaches at Ilam School — one of whom wrote "I was expecting the usual little package to be sent to our school with some pamphlets. ... Instead we were treated as legitimate researchers and received replies ... from the experts in every field (where) we'd asked a related question".

Continued on Page 48

Awards (continued from Page 27)



Technician's Medal

The New Zealand Association of Scientists Technician's Medal is awarded to the student who has completed the New Zealand Certificate of Science with the most outstanding performance over stages 3, 4, and 5. The 1994 Medal was won by Mr Hugh McMillan, of Westport who completed his studies in 1993 for a Certificate of Science in Chemistry, with the highest marks for the Stage 5 year, as determined by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. Mr McMillan is employed by the Coal Corporation of New Zealand Limited. The Association congratulates him and wishes him well for his future career.