
Editorial

In November 2008, Distinguished Professor of Theoretical Biology David Penny CNZM celebrated his 70th birthday.

As part of this celebration, David's colleagues at the Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution organised a symposium at the Bayview Chateau Tongariro in the Tongariro National Park.

Over an entire day and into the evening, former students, colleagues, and family illustrated David's contribution to their personal development, research, and scientific scholarship generally. The New Zealand Association of Scientists was one of several sponsors for the symposium and in this issue of *NZ Science Review* is pleased to publish the proceedings of the symposium as well as the tributes paid to David at the dinner following the symposium. Included in the latter is the tribute by Council members Mike Berridge and Chris Sissons, who recall David's contribution to the science policy debate in New Zealand at the time of the science sector reforms in the 1990s.

In 2000, David was awarded the NZAS Marsden Medal in recognition of his outstanding service to science and the profession of science. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand and, in 2004, was awarded the Rutherford Medal in recognition of his distinguished contributions in theoretical biology, molecular evolution, and the analysis of DNA information. In 2005, Massey University recognised David's eminence, nationally and internationally, in appointing him a Distinguished Professor, one of currently only six at the University. Further recognition came in the Queen's New Year Honours List of 2006, when he was made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to science. David is also a former president of NZAS.

David ranks among an elite group of New Zealand scientists whose h-index (a measure of scientific productivity and impact defined as the number of scientific papers that have been cited at least that number of times) exceeds 40. According to the ISI

Web of Science (March 2009), David's 188 papers have been cited 6888 times, with an average citation of 36.6. His top citation, 'Recovering evolutionary trees under a more realistic model of sequence evolution', published in *Molecular Biology & Evolution* in 1994, has been cited 638 times.

The eleven scientific contributions in this issue demonstrate the guidance David Penny has given former students during their postgraduate studies, colleagues working in similar research areas, and others from fields which at first glance might appear quite removed from biology. The tributes paid by former work colleagues, family, friends, and associates attest to David's unswerving attention to excellence in science, friendship, family – and fun. In responding to the tributes at the symposium dinner, David alluded to the factors that prompted his interest in science and subsequent research career. Afterwards, and with some encouragement, we persuaded David to capture these in the paper *Why Science?* which introduces this issue.

The value of long-term curiosity-driven interdisciplinary research is graphically demonstrated throughout these proceedings and, as the tribute to David from Hon. Pete Hodgson, the then Minister of Research, Science and Technology, says,

...you have built up a large and influential research group, culminating in the establishment of the Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution, one of our Centres of Research Excellence. These have been called the jewels in New Zealand's research crown, and competition to become such a Centre has been intense.

This is truly a special issue of *NZ Science Review* and without any hesitation we recommend it to NZAS members and others interested in science and science policy.

Mike Berridge and Allen Petrey
for NZAS Council