

Sir Alan Parkes, CBE, ScD, FRS 1900–1990

Publication of Volume 100 of the *Journal of Reproduction and Fertility* is a milestone in the progress of a successful venture which owes much to the initiative and early guidance of Alan Parkes, who was instrumental in its foundation. Yet, launching this Journal was but one of the many contributions that he made in his long and distinguished career. He had a major influence on developments in reproductive biology through the promotion of new areas of research and discovery, participation in the work of numerous committees and advisory groups and extensive publication.

Alan Parkes liked to stress the fact that he had a somewhat chequered and undistinguished early scholastic record, in contrast to his later achievements. Having obtained a degree in agriculture at Cambridge and a PhD from the University of Manchester, where his thesis was on the sex ratio in mammals, he started work in 1923 at University College, London. It was here that his career blossomed. He soon became intensively involved in reproductive endocrinology and during the next 20 years was an active participant in what he later described as 'the exciting times' when many of the important reproductive hormones were first discovered and characterized and their biological properties investigated. His contributions to this field were recognized by his election at an early age to Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1933. He continued this line of work when he moved to the National Institute for Medical Research in 1932 and it was only interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

It was characteristic of Alan Parkes that he sought a change of direction when he later reorganized his Division. Studies were initiated on mammalian gametes, but fate soon played a decisive role. After the chance discovery of the action of glycerol in preserving spermatozoa during freezing and thawing, research soon became almost totally diverted to low temperature biology. During the 1950s, red blood cells, endocrine tissues, ovarian grafts as well as gametes were successfully deep frozen and Alan Parkes became a founding father of the emerging new science of 'Cryobiology'. Yet another shift in direction was to the role of pheromones in animal reproduction, following the dramatic discovery of the pregnancy-blocking effect in mice by exposure to strange males.

When he moved to Cambridge in 1961 to take up the Mary Marshall Chair in the Physiology of Reproduction, Alan Parkes returned to his long-standing interest in comparative aspects of reproduction in wild animals. A close association was developed at this time with the Nuffield Unit in Uganda and he spent some years as Consultant to the



first captive breeding farm for green sea-turtles on Grand Cayman Island.

Throughout his life, Alan Parkes played a leading role in the development of scientific activities through association with a diverse variety of organizations. Of special importance were his Chairmanships of the Society for Endocrinology, the Society for the Study of Fertility and the Institute of Biology and membership of many advisory groups. His continued interest in population control, family planning and biosocial aspects of reproduction led to his active participation in the work of the Family Planning Association, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the Royal Commission on Population Control and WHO's Advisory Committee on Medical Research. The *Journal of Endocrinology* as well as the *Journal of Reproduction and Fertility* and the *Journal of Biosocial Science* are all tributes to his efforts and initiative.

The wide breadth of Alan Parkes' interests are well described in his autobiographical memoirs, *Off-beat Biologist* and *Biologist at Large*. They portray the life of a very gifted and inspirational scientist whose contributions to reproductive biology will long remain.

Chris Polge