

McMEEKAN MEMORIAL AWARD: 2000

Dr Geoffrey W. Asher

Dr Geoffrey Asher is virtually 'the author' of the World's literature on reproductive biology of fallow deer. Whilst he was establishing his foothold on the science of this animal it was an important farmed species in New Zealand and Geoff became well known to fallow deer farmers in this country. He was looked up to as the major authority on all aspects of livestock science with respect to fallow deer and has become entrusted, almost single-handedly, with the breeding up of the rare Mesopotamian subspecies (and its hybrids) in this country. Nevertheless, the nomination for the McMeekan Award is based on his contribution to animal production science over the last five years.

Geoff has continued to provide leadership in the AgResearch deer research programme by publishing at the top level on many aspects of deer reproduction, by developing reproductive technology for application to the deer industry and by maintaining a high level of technology transfer to deer farmers, veterinarians and advisers. Just to give some idea about the strength of this contribution, since 1995 he has published 24 papers (senior author of 13) in scientific journals, presented 7 papers at international conferences and written 3 articles for general readership.

Geoff has been recently engaged in research on the interaction between reproduction and nutrition in red deer – focussing on the effects of level of nutrition in late pregnancy on calf viability and gestation length. He is investigating the role of factors such as expression of oestrus, stag selection and dominance hierarchies on the poor reproductive performance of yearling hinds. Other work involves a study of the influence of chronic stress on reproduction in deer.

For direct application to reproductive manipulation programmes involving red deer and wapiti he is developing

improved techniques for superovulation in these species and is involved in embryo transfer as well as ovum pick up – *in vitro* fertilization procedures (OPU/IVF).

The deer industry in New Zealand benefitted from his earlier activity, which culminated with sales of deer semen into North America, along with selling the associated expertise. Latterly, the flow-on benefits of his work have been felt by farmers engaged in the rapid multiplication of offspring from valuable animals in this country.

Geoff is a perfect example of a scientist who does not let go of the basic biology underlying livestock production, which is shown by his flow of published papers in the leading scientific journals, but continues to pursue applied problems of direct relevance to the deer farmer. Geoff is well known throughout the deer industries of New Zealand, Australia and the United States of America but does not promote himself to become a leading light in these communities. The depth of his contribution is more likely to be gauged by organisations such as the New Zealand Society of Animal Production, where his peers, cognisant of the strength of the underlying scientific prowess behind Geoff's contribution to livestock production, are able to recognise and applaud him with this suitable award.



G K Barrell