

WILLIAM A. BRIDGER, FRSC

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**Richard E. Peter**  
**1943-2007**



Dick Peter died of a sudden heart attack on March 8, 2007 in Bamfield, BC shortly after taking up his most recent appointment as the Director of the Bamfield Marine Station. He was considered to be among the finest comparative neuroendocrinologists in the world. At the time of his death, Dick's research was focused on neuroendocrine regulation of secretion of gonadotropins, growth hormone and prolactin in teleost fish, including the nature of the brain hormones involved in regulating the secretion of the pituitary hormones, interactions between the neurohormones, receptor specificity for the neurohormones, and regulation of release and gene expression of the neurohormones themselves.

Dick was born in 1943 in Medicine Hat, and was raised in the Cypress Hills region of Southeast Alberta. He obtained his BSc (1965) from the University of Calgary (1965) and his PhD (1969) from the University of Washington. Following a short post-doctoral period in Bristol, England, he took up his academic appointment at the University of Alberta where he spent his entire career. He served two terms as Chair, Department of Zoology and two terms as Dean, Faculty of Science. Following his term as Dean, Dick was seconded as Vice-President (Integrated Resource Management) of the Alberta Research Council, and Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of the Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences of the Government of Alberta. This was followed by his appointment at the Bamfield Marine Station in 2006.

Dick was recognized, nationally and internationally, for his work on the neuroendocrine regulation of reproduction and growth in fish. His method of induction of spawning of agricultural fish and the development of the OVAPRIM kit were one of the practical results of his research in this area. He pioneered the use of radiofrequency stereotaxic thermal brain lesions and intracerebral ventricular injection to study the physiological role of various hypothalamic nuclei, neuropeptides and neurotransmitters in the regulation of pituitary hormone secretion in fish. He also produced brain stereotaxic atlases for several fish species for such experimental purposes. His lab was also one of the first to develop and make use of the then new radioimmunoassay technology to measure fish pituitary hormone secretion in the 1970s. He was awarded the NSERC Steacie Fellowship in 1980 in recognition of his significant work on fish reproductive physiology. For his contribution to this whole area of comparative endocrinology, he was awarded the Pickford Medal by the International Federation of Comparative Endocrinological Societies in 1985 (for seminal contribution to the field by a young scientist under the age of 45). Dick was also known for his extensive work on the neuroendocrine regulation of feeding behaviour and food intake in fish, which combine the use of molecular biology, immunohistochemical studies, classical neuroendocrinological techniques and physiological manipulations, as well as behavioural observations. For his contribution to the field of fish endocrinology, a named lecture series (The R.E. Peter Lecture) was inaugurated at the 5th International Symposium on Fish Endocrinology in 2004 in Spain. These and many other awards, including Fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada (1985) and the Fry Medal of the Canadian Society of Zoologists (2006), attest to his world-recognized scientific contribution to the field of fish neuroendocrinology and comparative endocrinology.

Dick was not only a prominent scientist, but he was also a great mentor. Dick supervised with great patience, personal attention and allowance for personal scientific freedom. Yet one was always aware of the great expectation and standard of excellence that had to be achieved. With a combination of timely encouragements, discussions, appropriately placed deadlines (such as international meeting deadlines), he effectively moved everyone along at the appropriate speed

towards successful completion of training. He trained over 20 graduate students, and at least 25 post-doctoral fellows and 9 visiting scientists from six continents and some 17 countries.

As Dean of Science, Dick had many achievements that were out of the ordinary and that will have long-lasting effects for Science at the University of Alberta. Perhaps most notably, his strength of persuasion and resolve resulted in the merger of five university departments (Microbiology, Botany, Genetics, Zoology and Entomology) to form a robust Department of Biological Sciences (still known in some circles as "BioHuge"). This new Department flourished during his tenure and to this day with enhanced teaching programs and research collaborations. A second merger involved "that of the Departments of Mathematics and Statistics. Mergers of university departments are naturally strongly resisted by those who simply oppose change from the familiar, or those with strong links to tradition or to disciplinary identity. These particular achievements represented the epitome of managerial talent: persuasion, cajoling, and the strategic use of the carrot and the stick.

In addition to scientific research contribution and mentoring, Dick also contributed to the advancement of comparative endocrinology and neuroendocrinology in many other ways. For example, Dick was one of the initiators (founders) who organized the different national and regional comparative endocrinology societies into the International Federation of Comparative Endocrinology Societies, in which he had served as president. He also founded the International Symposium on Fish Endocrinology quadrennial meeting series, which started with its first meeting in Edmonton in 1988. These and other scientific contributions, as well as his services on MRC and NSERC grant selection committees and editorial boards of several journals, all served to advance the life sciences in Canada and help to establish the international reputation of Canada as a strong country in comparative endocrinology, neuroendocrinology and fish physiology.

Dick Peter was an unforgettable character with boisterous joviality – a person that could not be inconspicuous in a crowded room. His voice and laughter had a remarkably deep and resonant timbre; as early as in high school he was known as "Amplifier". He had a great appreciation and knowledge of fine wine, food, art, ceramics and music. Dick Peter's friendship was a treasure; he will always be fondly remembered by his many associates, colleagues and friends as a true gentleman. His loss is, of course, most deeply felt by his family, wife Leona and sons Jason and Matthew.

*William A. Bridger, FRSC  
Professor Emeritus  
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*(Author's title given as of the time of writing)*

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obituary published by the Canadian Society of Zoologists.*