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Deborah Charlesworth

This, the first issue of what is now *Genetics Research*, is to honour Deborah Charlesworth who will be 65 on 13 March 2008. As her energy, scientific curiosity and productivity continue unabated, this artificial milestone will surely be a surprise to many.

Deborah has had an unusual career, much of the time without a 'proper' or appropriately paid job in successive institutions, including the Universities of Liverpool, Sussex and Chicago, until appointed an Assistant Professor at Chicago in 1988. This was mainly because she spent the early part of her career supporting that of her husband, Brian Charlesworth. Despite being trained as a biochemist, Deborah worked closely with Brian in what were then the new research areas for her of evolutionary biology and population genetics, and together they formed a partnership that made many fundamental contributions to these fields. One reason it took so long for Deborah's contributions to be recognised is that many mistakenly assumed that Brian was the main driver behind their many joint publications. He would be the first to admit that this is not the case. We in Edinburgh were delighted when Deborah came to a Chair here in 1997, nominally to a research position. However, her conscientiousness and concern for students is such that she has taken on far more teaching responsibilities than required.

She has made many important discoveries in population genetics and evolutionary biology, most notably in understanding the evolution of recombination, sex chromosomes and mating systems in plants. In recognition, Deborah was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2001 and a Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 2005, a distinction as yet achieved by very few women. She has held leading positions in scientific societies, including President of the European Society for the Study of Evolution and President of the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution.

As Deborah has had many collaborators over the years, it was difficult to come up with a list of contributors that would do justice to her breadth of interests and span her career. We realise that the absence of a paper from Brian is a glaring omission, but their close working relationship would have made it difficult for him to maintain the intended secrecy of the project from Deborah. We tried to select topics from purely theoretical to purely empirical, covering both plant and animal studies, and regret that space did not allow us to include more papers. From our initial list of present and former colleagues, collaborators and students of Deborah, we had a near 100% response despite time pressures. This highlights Deborah's contributions both as a leading scientist and as a mentor and role model for many others. She has always taken a long-term interest in the careers of her former students and postdocs, most of whom have gone on to become successful academics. Her guidance and inspiration has been greatly appreciated.

Photo by Jane Charlesworth

Deborah's theoretical and empirical research has always been at the cutting edge. Indeed, only a few years ago, when asked to list her most important ten papers she chose them all from the previous three years. It is difficult to imagine that she will quietly retire. Indeed, whilst Deborah has said she will be less involved in teaching following her first nominal retirement, she has already been awarded new grants to continue research and we expect continued important contributions both in publications and in interactions in the lab, at seminars and at conferences. We wish her a long, productive and happy 'retirement', with perhaps also more time to enjoy her many other interests.

Barbara Mable and Bill Hill
Glasgow and Edinburgh