



Lord ROBERT MAY of OXFORD
The IEEM Medal
for
Outstanding Commitment to Biodiversity and the Natural Environment
28 June 2012

The prestigious IEEM medal is awarded in 2012 to Lord Robert McCredie May, Baron May of Oxford, in recognition of his outstanding commitment to biodiversity and the natural environment.

Born in Sydney, Australia in 1938 and educated at Sydney Boys High School, Robert May decided against studying either law or medicine and instead went on to complete a bachelors degree in Chemical Engineering and Theoretical Physics in 1956 and then a doctorate in Theoretical Physics in 1959, both at the University of Sydney.

Following this, in what has become an illustrious career, Robert May has pursued interests including animal population dynamics and natural communities using his understanding of mathematics and physics, making major advances in the field of population biology and playing a key role in the development of theoretical ecology.

Robert May started his academic career as Gordon MacKay Lecturer in Applied Mathematics at Harvard University from 1959 until 1961. In 1962 he returned to Australia as Senior Lecturer and Reader in Theoretical Physics at the University of Sydney, and from 1969 to 1972 was Professor of Theoretical Physics. From 1973 until 1988 he was Class of 1877 Professor of Zoology at Princeton University, serving as Chairman of the University's Research Board from 1977 to 1988. Between 1988 and 1995 he held a Royal Society Research Professorship jointly at Imperial College London and the University of Oxford.

He currently holds a Professorship at Oxford University and is a Fellow of Merton College. He has published frequently in both 'Science' and 'Nature', amongst many other journals, and has also written several textbooks. He has also received several honorary degrees, including from the universities of Uppsala, Yale, Sydney and Princeton.

Robert May has been elected to several prominent scientific institutions, including Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1979, an Overseas Member of the Australian Academy of Science in 1991, a Foreign Member of the United States National Academy of Sciences in 1992, and to the Academia Europaea in 1994.

In addition to a remarkable academic career, Robert May has held several prominent scientific and advisory positions. He was Chief Scientific Advisor to the UK Government and head of the Office of Science and Technology from 1995 to 2000. This period, under Prime Ministers John Major and Tony Blair, saw him standing up for science during a time of public distrust over such issues as genetically-modified foods and Mad Cow Disease. He was also President of the Royal Society from 2000 until 2005, and has held many subsidiary appointments, including Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Natural History Museum, Trustee of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Independent Member of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Trustee of World Wildlife Fund-UK, and President of the British Ecological Society.

Not content with significant achievements in science, Robert May was created a Life Peer in 2001 on the recommendation of the House of Lords Appointments Commission. He was one of the first 15 Peers to be elevated in this way. He chose the style and title Baron May of Oxford, of Oxford in the County of Oxfordshire. His contributions as a crossbencher include promoting and supporting systematics and taxonomy, climate change adaptation, higher education and science funding.

Robert May is the recipient of many prestigious awards and honours, including a Knighthood in 1996, Companion of the Order of Australia in 1998, and the Order of Merit in 2002. He is only the fifth Australian to be awarded the Order of Merit in its 100-year history. Other awards include the Weldon Memorial Prize, the Medal of the Linnean Society of London, the Marsh Christian Prize, the Zoological Society of London Frink Medal, the Royal Swedish Academy's Crafoord Prize, the Swiss-Italian Balzan Prize, and the Japanese Blue Planet Prize. In addition, in 2007 he was awarded the Royal Society's oldest and most prestigious award – the Copley Medal – which is awarded annually for outstanding achievements in research in any branch of science. We hope that he will now be proud to add the IEEM Medal to this illustrious list.

From chemical engineering and theoretical physics to population dynamics and theoretical ecology and on to economics and politics, Robert May has continued to expand his contributions to science. For example, his interest in co-operative behaviour, and not just in the evolutionary biology sense, has shown us how non-fundamentalist religions have a role to play in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Lord Robert May of Oxford is an outspoken, charismatic and sometimes controversial proponent of biodiversity and ecosystems. Long may he continue to be so.