

Preface

The ear is an intricate structure whose anatomy and function has fascinated scientists since antiquity. Progress in our understanding of the cellular and molecular bases of the physiology of hearing has been quite impressive by the end of the 20th century. The development of the complexity and precision of the inner ear during embryogenesis is an extraordinary task. The field of ear development has followed the pace of other areas of developmental biology in trying to understand how this occurs at the cellular and molecular level. It is commonplace to relate the enormous progress in developmental biology to the explosion of DNA recombination techniques, the access to genetic manipulation of organisms, the import of ideas from fly development into vertebrate studies and, more recently, our knowledge of whole genomes. These events had indeed a strong influence on the modern views of ear development, but they are still very recent, just opening new ways of seeing old problems. These advancements form the basis of productive work in many laboratories today, a sample of which we provide in this *Special Issue of The International Journal of Developmental Biology*, which is focused on Ear Development. We want to thank Juan Aréchaga and the *Int. J. Dev. Biol.* Editorial Team for inviting us to undertake this task. It has been a great pleasure for us and should provide a rich source of knowledge for many. Being the Guest Editors of this Issue has indeed been a wonderful experience for both of us, including its episodes of hectic work and e-mail saturation. Overall, we feel privileged for having been asked to edit this Issue.

It is clear that this Special Issue is not exhaustive, neither with respect to the topics, nor the laboratories working on ear development. We are not only aware of this, but have been kindly scolded by some colleagues because of it. But we have consciously biased the Issue towards “genes and early ear development”, in part because we needed to select a finite number of contributions. We are aware of that and apologise for the many interesting topics and active laboratories that are not represented here. But above all, we want to give special thanks to the authors of the articles compiled in this Special Issue for their generous contributions and for dedicating, in particular, their time, an asset which is always in short supply. Their papers are excellent and updated reviews of rapidly moving fields which have taken a lot of work to prepare. These authors have always been very helpful to us and sometimes also very patient with some comments by the editors. Our congratulations go to them for this magnificent final result of which we can all be quite proud.

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