

## Book Reviews

*Andrewes' Viruses of Vertebrates*, 5th edition. Ed. J. S. PORTERFIELD. Pp. 457.  
London: Bailliere Tindall; 1989. £40.

Any book which has reached a 5th edition has become a standard work and this is particularly true of *Andrewes* – a shortening of the title which will be instantly recognized by all (animal) virologists. This new edition has appeared close to the 25th birthday of the original which was a solo effort by the late Sir Christopher Andrewes in 1964. The rapid accumulation of information on the structure (physical and chemical), replication, pathogenesis and epidemiology during the 1950s and early 1960s demanded a reference work to summarize these data and list the source references. Virologists, at least those working in human and veterinary medicine, have been in his debt ever since. However, to keep the size reasonable, he decided to omit plant, insect and bacterial viruses, a decision affirmed in all four subsequent editions.

The first edition was an instant success, at the elbow of those who wrote or taught virology. In the intervening 25 years, the basic format has changed little but there are interesting differences in this 5th edition compared with the 4th which was published in 1978. By the 4th edition, two additional authors had been co-opted but now the colossal task of reviewing the flood of literature on 'new' and 'old' viruses has required an editor supported by eight contributors, one of whom was an editor of the 4th edition.

How, then, does this edition compare with its predecessors? Inevitably, some selection over what to include and what to leave out has been made. The 5th edition is no thicker than the 4th partly from using thinner paper and partly from some essential reorganization and rationalization. Similarities rather than differences are emphasized and some earlier taxonomic caution has been laid aside, usually as a result of new knowledge. Consequently the new edition appears just as useful in answering queries on the size of the nucleic acid, the antigens, pathogenesis, epidemiology and control of the viruses. Not only that, a new section on diagnosis has appeared under some of the viruses and, with the lack of uniformity in the techniques used by various laboratories to make diagnoses, this represents a courageous decision. Given the status of *Andrewes* as a virus directory, I would have doubted the value of this addition, particularly if it kept useful data out. I do not think it has but it seems a little out of place amongst the rest of the hard data.

Another addition is a frontispiece of formalized drawings to scale of the various viruses. Some are more approximate than others but they do give some indication of comparative size. Further, these drawings are then used as logos at the head of the relevant chapter but here the drawings are all of a similar size regardless of the true size of the virus. Although they could act as an *aide-mémoire* and undoubtedly decorate the book which is otherwise a forbidding assembly of organized facts, I doubt if they add anything scientific. Light relief is not needed since this is a first-class reference book but not one to read from cover to cover (I hope!).

The last 11 years has seen the discovery of several new viruses, not least that causing AIDS in man. A new edition of *Andrewes* was much needed and, despite a few reviewers' niggles, this new edition deserves to be every bit as popular as its predecessors. Any virologist who has no copy of his or her own will always be trying to borrow somebody else's. It contains all the information that one cannot carry in one's head and the only way to ensure that it is available when you need it is both to buy your own copy and ensure that all your colleagues do as well! Book have not been cheap indulgences for some years now but the comparatively moderate price reflects, I am sure, the publishers' optimism over the number of copies they expect to sell. I am sure they will not be disappointed. It is also a splendid memorial to the book's originator who died recently.

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