

ANU MEDIA RELEASE

News from The Australian National University

WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2006

AUSTRALIAN GENETICIST RECEIVES TOP AWARD

ANU evolutionary geneticist, Professor Jenny Graves, has received one of five international awards given to women scientists for her studies on the evolution of mammalian genomes.

Professor Graves was selected as the Asia-Pacific laureate of the L'oréal-UNESCO for Women in Science 2006 awards by a panel of high-profile life scientists led by Gunter Blobel, who received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1999.

As part of the award, which was presented in Paris last week, Professor Graves received US\$100,000 and has been further elevated as an international role model for women in science.

Professor Graves is the Head of the Comparative Genomics Research Group at the Research School of Biological Sciences at ANU and is Director of the ARC Centre for Kangaroo Genomics based at ANU and the University of Melbourne.

Professor Graves was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science in 1999, was awarded a Centenary Medal for services to Australian genetics and genomics in 2002 and is the recipient of the AAS Macfarlane Burnet Medal for Biology in 2006.

Her research focuses on the evolutionary history of the human sex chromosomes, X and Y. Her team discovered that the gene on the Y chromosome thought to be responsible for testis development was not located on the Y chromosome in marsupials, which led to two of her former students identifying the correct sex-determining gene present on the Y chromosome both in placental mammals (such as humans and mice) and marsupials which branched off the evolutionary tree some 180 million years ago.

In a research paper to be published in the prestigious journal *Cell* this week, Professor Graves elaborates on this sex-chromosome research, and the implications of her predicted extinction of the Y-chromosome in humans.

Professor Graves said it was a great honour to receive an award that aimed to celebrate the contributions of women in science.

"This initiative also recognises talented early-career women researchers with a fellowship to pursue their research. These wonderful young women are the scientists who will be inspiring the next generation of young women to study science and pursue a career in the field.

"The message we all want to get through to young women – and young men – is that science is a wonderfully exciting and fulfilling career. I feel very lucky that I'm paid for doing what I've always wanted to do – detective work on the order and organisation of living things through genetics – and that this has allowed me to work with some terrific people and make some exciting discoveries," Professor Graves said.

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