Harry John Grier (1940–2018)

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HARRY JOHN GRIER was an accomplished reproductive morphologist, fisheries biologist, tropical fish farmer, and photographer. He was born on August 7, 1940 in New York City where he grew up. His early education was in the City's public school system, and he graduated in 1964 with a B.A. from Queens College (now part of the City University of New York). Harry’s contacts in and interactions with the local aquarium trade drew him to the study of the viviparous poeciliid fishes, the guppies, mollies, swordtails, and relatives. He was also encouraged and guided by Donn E. Rosen, ichthyologist at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), for whom Harry worked as a research assistant from 1963 to 1964. There Harry experienced aspects of museum science firsthand, including the importance of comparative biology and the value of a large biological reference collection.

When employed as a sheet metal worker in the early 1960s, Harry decided to pursue a scientific career against the objections of his mother who did not want him to leave a good paying, steady job. After getting his B.A., he headed south, never again to live in the northeastern USA. Harry completed an M.A. in 1968 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, followed by a Ph.D. in 1973 under the direction of Joe R. Linton at the University of South Florida, Tampa. Harry was the first person awarded a Ph.D. from that campus. His doctoral dissertation on “Reproduction in the teleost Poecilia latipinna: an ultrastructural and photoperiodic investigation” formed the basis of his first scientific publications (Grier, 1973, 1975). These combined his love of poeciliids and fish reproduction with his keen eye for anatomical detail and tireless photo documentation that would remain the cornerstones of his research throughout his life.

Harry held the post of Assistant Professor of Biology at USF for one year, then left for a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Endocrinology, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, from 1974 to 1976. He returned to Florida in 1976 to become the owner and manager of Florida Tropicals, a tropical fish farm in Lakeland. Harry moved easily between the academic and the aquarium worlds, understanding what each brought to our knowledge of the biology of tropical fishes. He served as an editor of the tropical fish hobbyist periodical Fresh Water and Marine Aquarium for 20 years from 1981 to 2001. For short periods in the early 1980s and again in the 1990s, Harry taught part-time at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa. Harry was an engaging teacher one-on-one as his many colleagues and students will attest. But the formal classroom did not suit him and a fish farm did not provide a reliable income, although he maintained fishes in his personal aquaculture facility on his property in Riverview, Florida, throughout his life. In 1984, Harry took a permanent position as a biologist in what is now the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute in St. Petersburg. One of his major assignments was to study the reproduction of some of the state’s most popular and important marine gamefishes: the Common Snook, Centropomus undecimalis, and the Red Drum, Sciaenops ocellatus. These two species became the focus of his 34-year research career at the FWRI.

Harry was a reproductive morphologist who always searched for the more general applications and implications of his research. He brought attention to the uniform structure of the germinal epithelium (Grier, 2000; Grier and Lo Nostro, 2000) and the significance of the basement membrane (Mazzoni et al., 2015) in gonad morphology, as well as modified the protocol for oocyte staging in fishes to make it adaptable to all taxa (Uribe et al., 2009). He maintained a strong interest in poeciliids and their relatives, as well as other atherinomorph fishes, all of which have a unique reproductive morphology, a feature that he discovered. In the late 1970s, one of us (LRP) was a graduate student

Fig. 1.  Harry Grier, St. Petersburg, Florida, 2006. Photo from H. J. Grier.

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