

Obituary

Sam H. Ridgway, 1936–2022



Sam H. Ridgway, pioneering marine mammal veterinarian and bioacoustician, passed away on July 10, 2022, in San Diego, California. Sam was born in Bigfoot, Texas, in 1936. He earned

his undergraduate degree in 1958 and a veterinary degree in 1960 from Texas A&M University (College Station). Sam, a commissioned veterinary officer in the US Air Force, was transferred to Point Mugu, California, in 1960 where he became one of the founders of the US Navy Marine Mammal Program (MMP). In 1970, he received a Navy fellowship to study under Richard Harrison at Cambridge University (Cambridge, United Kingdom) where he earned a PhD in neurobiology.

In 2007, Sam became founding president and CEO of the National Marine Mammal Foundation. Among his awards, Sam was elected Fellow of the Acoustical Society of America. He also received both the Lifetime and Clinical Medicine Awards from the International Association for Aquatic Animal Medicine and the Kenneth S. Norris Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for Marine Mammalogy.

Sam combined his interests in basic and applied science to advancing marine mammal medicine, bioacoustics, physiology, and behavior. He was known for his pioneering and ground-breaking discoveries that advanced the health and welfare of dolphins, porpoises, whales, sea lions, and seals. Indeed, often called the “father of marine mammal medicine,” Sam worked tirelessly in developing and refining his science.

Sam began his acoustic studies in the laboratory of E. G. Wever at Princeton University (Princeton, New Jersey). During those studies, Sam and his colleagues did the first recording of evoked potentials to measure turtle hearing as well as a series of studies that provided the first detailed examination of the dolphin ear and peripheral auditory system using anesthetized animals. Sam’s work with evoked potentials helped set the groundwork for their broad use in the study of marine mammal hearing

today, including pioneering efforts to study the hearing of stranded cetaceans for which no prior hearing information exists.

Sam was a scientist of many firsts, being the first to experimentally study temporary threshold shifts in cetaceans, the first to utilize functional medical imaging to study dolphin hearing, and the first to study the impact of hydrostatic pressure due to diving on the hearing of toothed whales.

Sam published more than 350 papers, books, and book chapters, and he wrote a popular book, *The Dolphin Doctor*. Although prolific in his work and a giant in the field, Sam was the quintessential mentor, teacher, and friend. One of the hallmarks of Sam’s career was his devotion to both veterinary and doctoral students. Indeed, to his last days, Sam always found time for students.

Sam always managed his life with kindness and refinement. He was acknowledged worldwide and deeply admired. Sam’s wife of almost 60 years, Jeanette Fuller Ridgway, passed away in 2020. Sam is survived by his brothers Don Ridgway and Sid Ridgway and their families.

Selected Publications by Sam H. Ridgway

- Ridgway, S. H. (2008). History of veterinary medicine and marine mammals: A personal perspective. *Aquatic Mammals* 34, 471-513.
- Ridgway, S. H. (2019). Ask an acoustician: Sam H. Ridgway. *Acoustics Today* 15(2), 45-47. <https://doi.org/10.1121/AT.2019.15.2.45>.
- Ridgway, S. H., Wever, E. G., McCormick, J. G., Palin, J., and Anderson, J. H. (1969). Hearing in the giant sea turtle, *Chelonia mydas*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 64, 884-890.
- Wever, E. G., McCormick, J. G., Palin, J., and Ridgway, S. H. (1971). The cochlea of the dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*: Hair cells and ganglion cells. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 68, 2908-2912.

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