Citation by Warren D. Allmon

The Gilbert Harris Award is presented annually by PRI in recognition of career excellence in systematic paleontology. It is named after the founder of PRI, whose commitment to systematic paleontology was legendary. The recipient is a scientist who, through outstanding research and commitment to the centrality of systematics in paleontology, has made a significant contribution to the science.

Jim Sprinkle is Professor, and the First Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Yager Professor, in the Department of Geology at the University of Texas at Austin. He received his undergraduate degree from MIT in 1965 and his PhD from Harvard University in 1971, studying there under Bernhard Kummel. Jim is the world’s foremost authority on early echinoderms, especially those of the Cambrian and Ordovician periods, and has done an enormous amount to elucidate the systematics and ecology of these organisms over the past three decades. His list of publications includes more than 135 titles covering almost all of the major Paleozoic groups of echinoderms. (And he has even recently published a paper on Cretaceous mollusks!)

Jim has worked on Paleozoic echinoderm communities across much of North America and abroad. Echinoderms are a very important clade, with pelmatozoans dominating during the Paleozoic and echinoids and asteroids very important after the Paleozoic. Modern genomic study of living echinoderms, however, has nothing to say about the dramatic early diversification of this clade. The work of Jim Sprinkle, more than anyone, has given us the data to determine the “who, when, and where” of early echinoderm phylogeny and evolution.

Especially over the last two decades, Jim and his colleagues have been working on Late Cambrian and Early Ordovician echinoderm communities from the Rocky Mountains, Texas, and Oklahoma. Most of this recent work has been done with colleagues Tom Guensburg (Rock Valley College, Rockford, IL) and former Ph.D. student Colin Sumrall (now University of Tennessee, Knoxville), funded by two NSF grants. Cambrian and Early Ordovician echinoderms are typically very rare and difficult to study. Much of what we know about these important fossils is due simply to the persistence and drive of Jim and his collaborators in the field and in the lab. These efforts have been particularly important in filling major gaps in the echinoderm fossil record. For example, they have recently been very successful collecting new echinoderms in the Early Ordovician, discovering several new faunas that are the largest ever found in North America from this interval. Jim and Tom published some of this work in PRI’s journal *Bulletins of American Paleontology* in 2001. The Late Cambrian project is now nearly finished (7 papers published, 1 more in press), but the Early Ordovician work (now 19 papers published, 3 more in press, and at least 10 more in preparation) has expanded so much that Jim himself says it will take many more years to complete.

Jim’s colleagues always mention his love of fieldwork, seemingly inexhaustible patience as a collector, and passion for new discoveries. He loves the weird and bizarre, of which there are plenty among Paleozoic echinoderms. Jim also has extraordinary ability as an artist to accompany his work along with editorial skills. Jim is one of those experts who are literally the central storehouse of systematic knowledge for a major group and time interval, a master paleontologist of the old school who continually provides ground-breaking discoveries of major importance for modern paleobiology.

It is with pleasure and honor that the Paleontological Research Institution presents its 2008 Gilbert Harris Award to James T. Sprinkle.