PREFACE

The essays presented in this book are concerned with some important aspects of contemporary research in the endocrinology of lower vertebrates. Although they do not, therefore, provide a completely comprehensive account of the endocrinology of these animals, their treatment does explore the relevant fields both in breadth and in depth, and is intended to demonstrate the inter-relationships of the problems with which they are concerned. Thus we hope that the contents of the book will be found to possess an underlying unity.

By the breadth of treatment, it is hoped to convey something of the range of biological interest in the field, and here the authors have had the needs of zoologists particularly in mind. Students of animal biology are sometimes apt to feel that comparative endocrinology is a specialized and almost esoteric subject with which they need have little concern. We hope to show that it is, on the contrary, a focal meeting ground for a diversity of biological problems that are of immediate concern to all who are interested in the physiology of animal adaptation, and its evolutionary history.

By the depth of treatment it is hoped to show the wealth of information which is now available in these fields, and to expose, by critical evaluation, those problems that particularly need further investigation to provide assured bases for generalization. In this respect, the essays will be of value to teachers and research workers in comparative endocrinology, and to undergraduates who are studying the subject at an advanced level, and who may wish to undertake research in it.

We hope, too, that the essays will be of interest also to those who are working in the fields of mammalian and human endocrinology. It has become increasingly apparent that an understanding of mammalian organization depends on an understanding of the foundations of that organization, as it is exemplified today in the lives of the lower vertebrates. We have not yet reached the stage in which accounts of vertebrate endocrinology can begin with the lower forms and work logically upwards to the mammals. Yet this book gives evidence (which readers may well find surprising) of the extent to which we have already progressed towards that goal.

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