

EDITORIAL

Like a rolling stone: the dynamic world of animal ecology publishing

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It has been another successful and busy year at *Journal of Animal Ecology*, with a number of new initiatives and an increase in *Journal* activity, with total submissions increasing by 13% over the last year, the number of open access papers increasing to an all-time high, and our impact factor increasing to 4.827. We also welcomed in 12 new Associate Editors and said goodbye to eight others. We would like to thank them all for their dedicated service to the *Journal*, but reserve special thanks to Simon Butler, Karl Cottenie, Simon Verhulst and Andy White, who left this year after each served for the maximum 9-year term. We never like to say goodbye to excellent AEs, but this is a necessary cost in our attempts to refresh the Editorial Board and to allow us to increase its diversity.

New initiatives

Over the past 12 months, *Journal of Animal Ecology* has launched two brand new ventures. The first aims to champion work by early career researchers by encouraging them as lead authors of *Review* and *Synthesis* articles. We opened a call for paper proposals earlier this year and were delighted with both the quality and quantity (over 50) of those that we received – there is clearly a large pool of excellent young animal ecologists out there and we are pleased to be able to provide them with a new avenue for showcasing their talent. The successful applicants will be submitting their manuscripts over the next few months and we will announce the winner in mid-2017. We will continue to award the Elton Prize for the best standard paper published in *Journal of Animal Ecology* by an early career researcher. The 2016 award will not be chosen until the spring of this year, but the 2015 Elton Prize winner was: Jonathan Pruitt (2015), for his paper (co-authored with Andreas Modlmeier) called ‘Animal personality in a foundation species drives community divergence and collapse in the wild’. The quality of submissions to the competition was extremely high, as always,

but Jonathan’s paper on spider personalities stood out for its genuine novelty and creativity.

Our second new initiative is a development to our *Special Features*. One of their key roles is to highlight important areas in animal ecology that are emerging and/or undergoing rapid development, and we want to continue to support this. Previous *Special Features* have been proposed by a small team of authors who put forward a selection of papers from their network of collaborators to cover a topic. We were interested in trying to open up this process to a broader range of individuals who perhaps take different, or even contrary, viewpoints. To this end, we decided to trial an ‘open call’ in which we invite potential authors from across emerging fields to contribute. This is not a new concept, and it appears to work successfully at other journals that have tried it, but it is new to us and we are keen to see how it works out. We will still continue to be receptive to fully formed teams of authors who wish to suggest potential *Special Feature* topics, but we do feel that this new approach could yield something different and exciting for our journal. The first of these open calls is in the area of ‘animal host–microbe interactions’. With the recent advent of modern molecular approaches, including next-generation sequencing, it has become possible to characterise the rich resident and transitory microbial communities living within animal hosts, including the host gut microbiome, covert pathogens and endo-symbionts. The recent explosion of this field over the last decade is starting to facilitate a greater understanding of the functional role and consequences of variation in animal host microbiota, and the ecological and evolutionary interactions between the host, its resident microbiota and factors such as disease susceptibility, nutritional ecology, life-history strategies, social networks and animal behaviour.

Improvements for authors and reviewers

We have also made several changes in-house to make all parts of the publication process easier and clearer for

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our authors, reviewers and readers. We now have a quick checklist for initial submissions to reduce the amount of time authors spend adapting papers to journal style on the first submission. We have started to encourage authors to cite their list of data sources within the paper to ensure that these are fully indexed and that proper citation credit is given to data producers. Authors of papers such as meta-analyses, which use a large number of data sources, are no longer confined to listing the data sources only as an appendix in the online Supporting Information, but can now include them all in the main paper as a second reference list. In addition, all papers will soon contain an Author Contributions Statement in the interests of greater transparency. We have also produced specific guidelines to assist reviewers assessing our *Synthesis* and *How to...* papers. The work of our reviewers is vital to the integrity of the peer review process, but researchers at later career stages often take a greater share of the reviewing burden. To help alleviate this, and to expand the pool of potential well-qualified reviewers, we actively encourage collaborative review between students or early career researchers and their laboratory leaders. To help with this process, potential reviewers are encouraged to take advantage of the BES's 'A Guide to Peer Review', which is available free to download from the Society's website.

As well as finding ways to expand our pool of reviewers, we continue to work on ensuring that our Editorial Board is diverse and representative of our authors and readership. Equality and diversity is, quite rightly, a topic firmly in the public eye. We have recruited many excellent new Associate Editors to *Journal of Animal Ecology* this year. Our board covers 16 countries and we have greatly improved the gender ratio to 43% female (up from 33% in 2015 and just 13% in 2014) – profiles for all of our current Associate Editors are available on our website. We are far from complacent, however, and will continue to build on this and strive for a more internationally diverse Editorial Board. We encourage enquiries from animal ecologists with appropriate reviewing experience who wish to become an Associate Editor. To apply send your CV and a covering letter to the editorial office; all applications will be assessed by the Senior Editors twice a year.

Data archiving

The Journal has long been a supporter of data archiving and has required all data associated with papers we publish to be archived in a public repository since January 2014. After almost 3 years, we are seeing authors use a number of different archives. As we are integrated with *Dryad*, this is by far the most commonly used archive, with 65.4% of papers storing their data there, other repositories include *figshare* (5.2%), a variety of university-based repositories (2.3%), *NERC* Data Centres (2%), *Movebank* (1.6%), *Genbank* (1.6%), *CRAN* (0.3%)

and other archives (8.2%). A number of our authors (13.4%) still use online Supporting Information, although we strongly recommend using a recognised repository for data archiving. The reasons for this are that the data are then citable, searchable and more discoverable. In addition, if you use a repository that issues a DOI, then both the paper and the data are citable. We can see from the deposits by authors in *Dryad* that 88% of authors made their data available immediately on publication, with just 12% choosing to embargo their data for 12 months, and only four longer embargoes were granted.

Social media and other activities

The Journal's social media presence continues to grow, with regular posts on *Twitter* and *Facebook* about the research we publish and the conferences we attend – at a number of these we also host 'Meet the Editor' sessions where readers and authors can come and tell us what they think of the Journal. We continue to write about ecology and related issues on our *Animal Ecology in Focus* blog. Last year, we posted more than 30 blogs including one by Associate Editor Andy Fenton on the role of animal ecology in understanding vector-borne diseases such as Zika; another by Managing Editor Erika Newton on peer reviewing; and a joint blog by Associate Editor Sheena Cotter and Senior Editor Ken Wilson on how to solve the skewed sex ratio on science journal editorial boards. The blog also featured a number of posts adapted from author press releases, helping to increase the readership of those papers. We welcome ideas for future blog posts and potential authors. We published a number of *Virtual Issues* on topical areas of animal ecology, including a VI on 'Evolutionary Ecology', edited by Senior Editor Ben Sheldon, another on 'Nutritional Ecology' by Associate Editor Spencer Behmer and a third on 'Movement Ecology', by Associate Editor Luca Börger, coinciding with the publication of our *Special Feature* on the same topic.

Greater collaboration

Last year also saw closer collaboration with our partner British Ecological Society journals (*Functional Ecology*, *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Journal of Ecology*, *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*) broadening the scope of the work covered and linking with other fields of ecology. The joint *Special Feature* 'Demography Beyond the Population' included papers from the six BES journals (including our partner open access journal *Ecology and Evolution*). This interdisciplinary *Special Feature* integrates novel lines of research in the vast field of demography that directly interact with other ecological and evolutionary disciplines. *Journal of Animal Ecology* also contributed papers to a number of cross-journal *Virtual Issues* including 'Novel Ecosystems in the Anthropocene', 'Endangered Species' and 'Demography Behind the

Population'. We look forward to engaging more with the other BES journals in the future.

In this volume

This year, we are excited to be publishing more *Review* and *Synthesis* papers, including papers from the early career researcher competition. In this issue, we start the year with a 'How to...' by Matthew Wolak and Jane Reid on 'How to include genetic groups in quantitative genetic animal models and accounting for genetic differences among unknown parents in microevolutionary studies' (Wolak & Reid 2017). The *In Focus* for this issue is by Ruth Hufbauer (2017), who discusses the paper by Wagner *et al.* (2017) that looks at how the genetic mixture of multiple source populations can

catapult the spread of biological invasions. And of course we have a great collection of original research papers. Enjoy the read!

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