

## Editorial



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## Ten years and counting

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In the year that *Philosophical Transactions* turns 350 years old, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Biology Letters*; somewhat less auspicious but nevertheless an important milestone and a proud achievement for the journal and its team.

After 2 years being published as a supplement to *Proceedings B* from 2003 to 2005, *Biology Letters* published its first issue as an independent journal on 21 March 2005. In his inaugural editorial, the first Editor-in-Chief, Brian Charlesworth, looked to the future with optimism and with the objective then, as now, for *Biology Letters* to become a leading, if not the leading, short format, rapid publication journal for the biological sciences [1].

Ten years later, we are well on our way to achieving that ambition. We now publish approximately 200 papers per year with an issue every month. Readership continues to expand apace with submissions continuing to increase year-on-year in a growing global market, a trend that is also reflected by the widening geographical spread of our authorship.

We provide our authors with the best possible service in terms of speed, feedback and media promotion. We are maintaining highly competitive publication times, with our time from submission to a first decision on a manuscript averaging just 24 days in 2014, and our articles continuing to garner significant media coverage—from the observations of the spine of the hero shrew [2], through to chimpanzees using tools to retrieve food [3].

Our aim to cover all the biological sciences is also being fulfilled, providing readers not only with cutting edge papers in their own fields but also providing access to innovative work being carried out across the full biological spectrum.

Animal behaviour and evolutionary biology are our two most popular subject areas. The latter includes our most cited paper so far by Ericson *et al.* [4] on 'Diversification of Neoaves: integration of molecular sequence data and fossils' a multi-authored paper describing definitive molecular evidence for an early Tertiary diversification of bird lineages consistent with the fossil evidence. Our second most highly cited paper is currently by Keith *et al.* [5] in the area of global change biology on 'Predicting extinction risks under climate change: coupling stochastic population models with dynamic bioclimatic habitat models'. It was this contribution to our special feature in 2008 on 'Global change and biodiversity' [6] that illustrated the need to understand the relationship between habitat change and population dynamics in predicting the response of species to future climate change.

In addition to citations, our article downloads are rapidly increasing, with more than 1.3 million full-text downloads seen in 2014. Our all-time download record concerned a study carried out and co-authored by school children. Given the simple title of 'Blackawton bees' [7], the study was co-ordinated by Beau Lotto from UCL's Institute of Ophthalmology, but the hypotheses and experiments were devised by a class of 25 eight- to ten-year-old children who also carried out the data analysis. Using imaginative experiments, they were able to show that bumblebees could recognize spatial configurations of colour enabling them to decide which colour flowers to visit for food. It was an unusual paper, but one we were nevertheless proud to publish. To date, it has attracted over 200 000 downloads.

Looking to the future, we aim to continue expanding our geographical reach and in particular we welcome submissions from countries beyond Europe and North America. We are also beginning to further widen our subject coverage, so far by adding freshwater biology and palaeoecology as new subject areas. The former will allow us to complement our strength in marine biology, and



Invited to commemorate 350 years  
of scientific publishing at the Royal  
Society.

thereby cover all aspects of aquatic biology, and the latter will strengthen our coverage of the temporal dimension in biology that is especially important in understanding recent global environmental change.

A further aim is to increase the range of publishing opportunities we can provide to our authors by enabling the submission of closely related papers as 'mini-series', and introducing 'reviews' as a new article type. Our first review was published earlier this year on 'Animal personality as a cause and consequence of contest behaviour' [8]. To date, we have published five reviews, and we intend to maintain a flow of review papers at the rate of approximately one per month.

Our 'mini-series' plan is more of a new departure. There is often great value in clustering related material together, whether, for example, generated by a large research project or deriving from a special session of a conference. We are planning for each submission to have between three and five research articles together with a brief introductory article, and our intention is for all the papers in a mini-series to be published together in the same issue.

Over the last 10 years, we have published a number of special features from across the range of biological sciences, at the rate of approximately one per year, the most recent being 'Frontiers in marine movement ecology' guest-edited by Lee Fuiman, Benjamin Walther and Pablo Munguia. It is our tribute to 350 years of publishing by the Royal Society and celebrates our 10th Anniversary. It is an excellent and

topical collection of papers illustrating the importance of understanding the ecology of migration and dispersal of marine populations in the face of future pressures from fisheries, habitat modification and climate change [9].

We are committed to publishing a special feature at least once per year with topics drawn from across the biological spectrum. Plans for the future include features on extinction biology, arctic sea-ice biology, palaeontology and phylogeny, and ocean acidification.

Our success over the last ten years has been built on the vision and guidance of Brian Charlesworth assisted by Charlotte Wray, our former publishing editor, the professionalism and dedication of our current in-house editorial staff at the Royal Society, principally Surayya Johar and Raminder Shergill, the acumen, and enthusiasm of our current four handling editors, Paul Sniegowski, Nigel Bennett, Rodney Honeycutt, and Mark Briffa and the support of an outstanding international editorial board, covering several continents and with expertise representing all branches of biology.

Finally and perhaps most importantly our success is also dependent on our reviewers whose selfless efforts, critical assessments and high standards we rely upon. As we move into our second decade, I should like to thank them and everyone associated with the journal for their continued support.

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