

Editorial

THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

In 1998 *Animal Conservation* was launched to provide a new forum for rapid publication of scientifically rigorous studies of conservation biology. It was hoped that articles would draw from a variety of disciplines, ranging from genetics to population biology to behavioural ecology to palaeobiology. Five years on, it is hard to believe that the editorial that accompanied the first issue felt the need to remind people that conservation biology had indeed come of age as a mainstream biological science. The subject is widely taught at universities, fills about a dozen excellent textbooks, and underpins our understanding of a wide variety of high-profile problems from impacts of climate change to loss of biodiversity and management of endangered species and habitats.

Given the growth of this subject, it is hardly surprising that researchers now have access to a number of journals that are devoted to conservation science. There is overlap among most conservation journals. The main distinguishing feature of this journal is that it is restricted to scientifically rigorous research papers from relevant areas of the biological sciences that are fast-tracked for publication within six months of submission. The journal also encourages authors to lift their sights above their particular species or geographical area, to bring out the generality and synthesis of their results for advancing the field.

Looking back

We have published four issues per year since the journal's inception, yielding a total of 188 papers up to the end of 2002. Although ISI began 'tracking' *Animal Conservation* from its inception, the journal will not receive its first impact factor score until the summer of 2003. Our goal of attracting a truly international set of contributors and subscribers has been met, with papers from 38 countries.

Table 1 gives a breakdown of the number of papers published according to subdiscipline and whether they were based on empirical studies or theoretical and comparative research. We have achieved a healthy mix of empirical and theoretical analyses in a wide variety of subdisciplines. Indeed, it was difficult to categorise many of the papers because they typically drew upon two or three of the subdisciplines listed here.

Table 2 shows that the journal has also attracted papers based on a wide variety of taxa, though as is typical of most whole-organism research, there has been a strong bias towards the big and glamorous species. While one might argue that such species are often the ones that are

Table 1. Breakdown of papers published during the first five years according to subject matter.

	Empirical	Theoretical/ comparative
Behaviour	5	1
Ecology	46	15
Genetics	22	4
Identification	2	5
Management		
captive breeding	3	1
translocation/reintroduction	5	5
reserve selection	1	3
sustainability	10	8
Palaeobiology	2	0
Phylogenetics	13	3
Population biology	9	20
Wildlife disease	3	2

most at risk and provide general lessons for conservation, we aren't so sure, and we will never know if more people don't study them! So we would be pleased to receive more papers on invertebrates. It seems surprising that we have received so few papers on amphibians, given the widespread concern about their conservation status. It is also interesting that theoretical and comparative papers on fish species outnumber empirical studies, whereas the converse is true for birds and mammals. Many of the non-empirical papers on fish species involve fisheries-related topics, reflecting an increasing interest by conservationists in this field, which used to dwell solely in mainstream fisheries journals.

There has also been a strong bias towards terrestrial studies, which accounted for 84% of the 116 studies that could be assigned to specific habitats. This matches the typical research pattern for conservation and general studies of ecology and population biology. The remaining studies were split evenly between freshwater and marine taxa. We are not the first to implore the scientific community to pay more attention to marine and freshwater conservation. With pressing issues such as the mysterious declines in amphibians from many parts of the world, and

Table 2. Breakdown of papers according to taxon studied

	Empirical	Theoretical/ comparative
Insects	6	0
Other invertebrates	2	0
Fishes	6	11
Amphibians	2	0
Reptiles	11	0
Mammals	63	27
Birds	22	12
Other (no taxa/cross-taxa)	0	26

the not-so-mysterious losses of marine and freshwater habitats, surely much more work is urgently needed concerning biology and management in these habitats, including population vulnerability, sustainable use and prioritisation for protected areas.

It is also worth asking why the journal has so far restricted itself to studies of animals. This was a decision taken at the outset for reasons that may not be so relevant today. But we feel that it is legitimate to include studies of organisms other than animals, where they influence animal conservation. Hence community and ecosystem studies can easily fall within our journal, whereas individual studies of plant populations cannot. We welcome your views and suggestions on achieving a broader scope for the journal.

There have been some changes in the editorship over the past five years. The founding editors were Mike Bruford, John Gittleman, Georgina Mace and Bob Wayne. Georgina Mace stepped down in 2001 and was replaced by John Reynolds, and Keith Crandall will replace Bob Wayne in 2003. We want to record our thanks to Georgina Mace for her enormous efforts at shepherding the journal through its early years. She continues in an important advisory role as Director of Science at the Zoological Society of London. We also want to record our thanks to Morris Gosling, who was a key player in the original establishment of the journal, liaising between the editorial team and Cambridge University Press. We also thank Linda DaVolls, the journal's production manager in London, for her continuing efforts as the main point of contact between authors, referees, editors and Cambridge University Press. Our rapid turnaround time has much to do with her combination of organisational ability, diplomacy, and 'gentle' reminders to keep editors, reviewers and authors on time. The journal's success has depended on the excellent advice that we have received from our reviewers, who have joined in the spirit of our goal of providing rapid turnaround times. Finally, we are grateful to our authors and members of the editorial board: the former for continuing to submit stimulating research papers, and the latter for their advice to the editors when in need of extra guidance.

Looking forward

With this issue we are launching a new format for the cover. We hope this is more visually appealing and it is also more relevant in illustrating a paper contained in the issue. We would like to set up a database of photographers who are willing to achieve fame (if not fortune) by contributing photographs relevant to papers in each future issue. If you have a selection of photographs which you think might be suitable for our cover, please contact the editorial office in England or in the United States so we can add your name to our email list.

Another new feature will be a series of review articles. We hope to attract one review per issue, including some that we will commission, and others that we hope will be submitted to us initially as a one-page outline to be followed by the full manuscript after the idea has been approved by the editors. As with our regular contributed papers, these reviews should be analytical and synthetic in nature (rather than commentaries), and they will be subject to rigorous peer review.

Authors now have a choice of submitting manuscripts either as paper formats or as pdf documents attached to emails. We are also investigating the use of dedicated software for submissions and reviews, and we will update our instructions to contributors when this becomes available.

It is hard to believe that it was only five years ago that we expressed our high hopes for the successful launch of a new journal in conservation biology devoted to rigorous research and rapid publication time. We are delighted with the journal's success to date, and we feel that the results have been important for advancing our general understanding of the issues that underpin conservation action. We look forward to receiving many more excellent manuscripts on this subject, and thank everyone who has been involved with the journal for its continuing success.

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