

## FROM THE EDITORS' DESKS

**W**ith this issue, we have nearly completed our first year as the new editors of the *Journal of Paleontology*. When we assumed editorship at last year's GSA Meeting, we inherited a nine-issue (18-month) backlog of papers that were awaiting publication. Allowing such a backlog to grow is out of the question. Maintaining it is unacceptable. Reducing the time between final acceptance and publication is our first priority as editors.

To that end, we have already taken steps to reduce the backlog by mechanical means.

- You will have noticed that much of the Systematic Paleontology section is now published in a reduced font size.
- We also have been requesting permission from authors to place more information from several papers into our online Supplemental Data Archive accessible through our journal's website (<http://www.journalofpaleontology.org/>). In particular, most files containing detailed locality information, specimens examined, character and character state descriptions, and data matrices are now found in the online archive.
- At the last Paleontological Society Council meeting, we were given *one-time* funds to purchase a limited number of additional pages in two issues in Volume 81, and a commitment for additional one-time funds for four issues in Volume 82. You will notice that this issue of *JP* is considerably thicker than previous issues.
- We have asked a number of authors to resubmit significantly shortened versions of their manuscripts as Paleontological Notes.

We are happy to say that these steps have allowed us, as of this issue, to catch up by one full issue. Even so, all of the papers in volume 81, and many of those that will appear in volume 82, are part of the backlog. Our goal is to reduce the average time between final acceptance and publication to eight months or less. This task is made all the more difficult because submissions to *JP* are on the rise. This year promises to reach record levels. As we write this, we are on track to receive over 190 new submissions in 2007—a roughly 30% increase over 2006.

A bit of quick math illustrates the new reality. The *Journal of Paleontology* published 75 full articles and 15 Notes in 2006. If *JP* receives 190 submissions for 90 “slots,” **we must reject 50% of manuscripts just to avoid allowing the backlog to grow.** The rejection rate must be even higher to reduce the backlog and reach our goal of eight months or less.

This high rejection rate will be unpopular. We, the editors, will be unpopular. But business as usual will not control and reduce *JP*'s backlog. Our revised Instructions for Authors lays out our intent and our new criteria for evaluating manuscripts:

All manuscripts are competing for limited journal space. Those that demonstrate broad significance with applications to such areas as stratigraphy and biostratigraphy, paleoecology, biogeography, phylogeny reconstruction and evolutionary paleobiology will be high priorities for publication, as will be those that use modern phylogenetic or morphometric methods. Manuscripts that simply

describe single new taxa (particularly single new species) are low priorities for acceptance—that a taxon is new to science is not in itself sufficient justification for inclusion in the *Journal*.

We are not experts in all areas of paleontology; we rely on the careful evaluation of manuscripts by our reviewers to discriminate among submissions. These criteria are also spelled out in our revised Instructions for Reviewers. For years *JP* reviewers were asked to rate the importance of manuscripts on a scale from 1 to 5. To aid our reviewers, to make reviews more uniform, and to provide us with more information on which to judge manuscripts for acceptance or rejection, we have defined these ranks:

5. Outstanding paper that demonstrates major significance to areas of paleontology and/or geology beyond systematics. Highest priority for publication.
4. Very good paper whose interest will extend beyond specialists in this and related groups. Should be a priority for publication.
3. Strong contribution to systematics but of interest primarily to specialists in this and related groups. Publish if journal space permits.
2. Competent but of limited interest OR with problems that require major revision. Lowest priority for publication.
  1. Seriously flawed; reject.

It is not our goal to impede the publication of interesting and novel paleontological discoveries. We are as committed as all of our predecessors to the support and promotion of specimen-based paleontology. However, we cannot publish everything that is submitted. **We firmly believe that we will also improve the overall quality of *JP* by being more selective about the manuscripts that we publish.**

To avoid using up too much space to tell you that we have limited space, we will not review current trends in *JP* subscriptions. Suffice to say subscriptions have declined, and they have done so for a variety of reasons. One longer-term solution that has been proposed is shifting to online-only publication. This has been and continues to be discussed in several forums within the Society and outside of it. However, online-only publication is not a panacea for *JP* and must be integrated into The Paleontological Society's overall business model before proceeding. Online publication likely will become the standard in academic publishing in the future. The steps that we are taking now to reduce the backlog and elevate the broader significance of papers in *JP* are not at odds with online publishing. We believe that they will position the *Journal of Paleontology* for a smooth transition to that format in a manner that retains its importance and timeliness of publication for paleontologists globally.

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