

Editorial



Check for updates

Cite this article: Barrett SCH. 2017

Proceedings B 2017: the year in review.

Proc. R. Soc. B **285**: 20172553.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2017.2553>

Editor-in-Chief

SCHB, 0000-0002-7762-3455

The year 2017 is looking like another successful year for *Proceedings B* with the journal going from strength to strength and maintaining its standing as one of the leading journals in the world in the biological sciences. This is despite fierce competition from an increasing number of journals specializing in our core areas of ecology, evolution and behaviour. Our efforts to diversify the scope of the journal have paid off and we are now receiving a wider range of articles in the biological sciences. This year we introduced nine subject areas in the Table of Contents (*Behaviour, Development & Physiology, Ecology, Evolution, Morphology & Biomechanics, Genetics & Genomics, Neuroscience & Cognition, Palaeobiology, Global Change & Conservation*), reflecting the current diversity of submissions and helping readers to rapidly locate content of particular interest.

During 2017, we maintained our reputation for rapid publication of high-quality articles. Up until 31 October, shortly before this article was written, we had received 2355 submissions, of which 78% were rejected and 512 accepted. Articles took on average 32 days from the date of submission to first decision, 77 days to final acceptance, and 103 days from time of receipt to online publication. Submissions to the journal have increased by 89 compared with the same time period in 2016, and our current projections are approximately 2826 submissions by the end of the year. A growing number (105) of articles are open access making up 21% of all accepted manuscripts. The largest number of submissions to date this year has come from the USA (586), UK (365), Australia (161), Germany (149), Canada (140), China (140), France (95), Japan (82) and Switzerland (73). In future, we would like to receive more articles from South America, Africa, and the Asian subcontinent and we are working on raising our profile in these regions.

Citation metrics for *Proceedings B* remain competitive with an Impact Factor (a measure of how often an average article in the journal has been cited) of 4.94 and the journal is ranked 9th out of 84 journals in the Journal Citation Reports category for 'Biology'. We have improved our *Proceedings B* metrics page (<http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/citation-metrics>) and it is now possible to retrieve a wide range of journal and article-based information, including useful descriptions on how individual metrics are defined and calculated. As a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) (<http://www.ascb.org/dora/>), we recognize the need to improve the manner in which articles in *Proceedings B* are evaluated by providing a range of different citation metrics based on different criteria.

Reviews in *Proceedings B* are a popular forum for authors, providing new perspectives on emerging fields, and because of their synthetic nature they are often highly cited. So far in 2017, the journal has received a healthy number of review proposals (66), so we are close to meeting our target of 75 proposals for the year. This year 18 reviews have been published and we expect to publish approximately 25 by the end of the year. In the spring, Innes Cuthill took over from Per Lundberg as Reviews Editor (<http://blogs.royalsociety.org/publishing/proceedings-b-appoints-a-new-reviews-editor/>) and introduced a new template for author proposals, making it easier to assess their quality. The 2017 Darwin Review 'The Sources of Adaptive Variation' by Deborah Charlesworth, Nicholas Barton and Brian Charlesworth [1] was published in May providing a timely assessment of recent claims that Neo-Darwinism is in need of revision owing, in part, to recent work in epigenetics [2]. Charlesworth *et al.* critically assess these claims and argue that natural selection is the only credible process responsible for the evolution of adaptive traits and,

as a consequence, no radical revision of Neo-Darwinism is necessary. You can read more about this Darwin Review in our Publishing Blog (<http://blogs.royalsociety.org/publishing/proceedings-b-2017-darwin-review/>), in which the authors discuss several issues surrounding recent controversies in evolutionary biology. We use our blog to highlight particular reviews in *Proceedings B*, e.g. Climate change and infectious diseases by C. Jessica Metcalf and colleagues, <http://blogs.royalsociety.org/publishing/ch-ch-changes-looking-again-at-infectious-disease-and-climate-change/>, and recently published articles, as well as to encourage more review proposals. Several more blogs are lined up for later this year, so keep an eye on our website.

Each year *Proceedings B* publishes Special Features, which are composed of a collection of articles on a specific theme, and all content is freely available upon publication. In 2017, Guillaume Chomicki and Susanne Renner guest edited a Special Feature, 'The Interactions of Ants with their Biotic Environment' containing 12 articles dealing with interactions between ants and other insects, plants, microbes and fungi that were investigated from both microevolutionary and macroevolution time scales using a wide range of approaches from field studies to molecular genetics. A second Special Feature guest edited by Sarah Brosnan and Erik Postma, 'Humans as a Model for Understanding Biological Fundamentals', will be published in December and is eagerly awaited.

Proceedings B has continued our association with Publons (<https://publons.com/home/>), which enables our referees to obtain credit for the reviews that they undertake for the journal. From 1 January to 31 October 2017, over 915 reviews by 683 referees have been uploaded to the Publons site involving 27% of the reviewers for the journal. This illustrates the steady growth in the popularity of Publons over the preceding year, which is also reflected in an average score of 8.1 in reviewer satisfaction.

Submission of unpublished articles to preprint servers, such as bioRxiv (<https://www.biorxiv.org/about-biorxiv>), has increased rapidly in popularity in several biological sub-disciplines. To take advantage of this service, and to enable the journal to evaluate potentially interesting articles that may be suitable for *Proceedings B* following peer review, we have appointed a Preprint Editor, the first among the Royal Society journals. Maurine Neiman (University of Iowa) took over this role during the summer. In June, with the assistance of a team of 10 trainees, she conducted a survey of authors with preprints lodged on bioRxiv to gauge interest in possible submission to our journal. Based on the success of this survey, involving some 900 articles of which approximately 10% were considered potentially suitable, she has now moved ahead with active solicitation of articles and already this has yielded submissions to *Proceedings B*. In order to track the number of submissions we receive from bioRxiv, we have introduced a new 'Preprint Flag' in Scholar One, and authors will soon be able to pick 'Preprint Editor' as an option for the question—'how did you hear about the journal?' Using the flag and the author question will enable us to track the number of submissions to the journal from this source. Also from 2018, authors will be able to directly submit their manuscripts from bioRxiv to the journal. With the increasing competition among organismal biology journals for articles we believe this initiative involving a designated Preprint Editor will help to ensure that we continue to receive high-quality submissions.

In August, two Royal Society staff members, Shalene Singh-Shepherd of *Proceedings B* and Helen Eaton of *Philosophical Transactions B*, visited Beijing, China, for outreach activities. This included organizing a joint session with the British Ecological Society at the *International Congress of Ecology* (INTECOL) on 'Publishing in high-quality international journals'. The presentations at this session were well received by approximately 130 people that attended. While in Beijing, Shalene and Helen also visited two institutions (Peking University and the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences) to promote Royal Society journals and to learn more about how scientists in China go about publishing their work. At both institutions, they made presentations concerning best practices in publishing articles in international journals and met students and faculty. The visits were warmly received and were particularly valuable for networking opportunities and establishing contacts with senior scientists in China. In August, I was also involved with journal outreach activities and participated in a 'Meet the Editors' session at the European Society for Evolutionary Biology (ESEB) meeting at Groningen, The Netherlands, organized by Surayya Johar of *Biology Letters*. Along with editors from the *Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, *Evolution Letters*, *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, *Current Zoology* and *Biology Letters*, we fielded a range of questions on publishing associated with topics such as transparency in peer review, open access, data accessibility, impact factors and the use of preprints.

We continue to take a proactive stance to redress gender imbalance on the editorial board of *Proceedings B* so that it mirrors our readership. We are currently recruiting new Associate Editors (AEs) to replace retiring members of the board. Since April 2017, we have recruited 18 new AEs of whom 10 are women. By January 2018, the board will comprise 131 AEs; 58 (44.3%) female and 73 (55.7%) male. This represents a 5% increase in female representation since last year and a striking 20% increase since 2015. These numbers are likely to change as we are still filling a few remaining spots on the board. We also recently surveyed reviewers and authors of submissions to *Proceedings B* during 2016 and invited them to complete an anonymous questionnaire so that we could gather diversity data. We received 199 responses ($n = 2161$; 9.2% response rate) from individuals submitting articles and 187 responses ($n = 5852$; 3.2% response rate) from those who were invited to review. The breakdown for submissions was 42.7% female and 56.3% male, and for reviewers was 35.8% female and 62.6% male. The remaining percentages for both categories preferred not to say. We will continue with these efforts to investigate diversity as part of broader efforts at the Royal Society to address unconscious bias in science.

I would like to welcome all new AEs to the *Proceedings B* editorial board. I look forward to working with you over the coming few years and hopefully meeting some of you in person at our annual board meetings in London in May of each year. It is a particular pleasure to welcome Victoria Braithwaite (Professor of Fisheries and Biology at Pennsylvania State University), who has served as an AE for the journal over the past 5 years, and will now join our group of six other editors. Victoria's expertise covers the fields of animal behaviour, cognition and welfare and you can learn more about her research by visiting our publishing blog where she was recently featured (<http://blogs.royalsociety.org/publishing/proceedings-b-appoints-a-new-editor/>). I would also like to

thank all current editorial board members for their hard work, loyalty and service to the journal, and in particular, all AEs who will be retiring from the board at the end of this year. Thank you for all your efforts and wise council on the occasions when I have needed advice. We could not run such a successful journal without the support of our editorial board and I am very grateful for your contributions. Thanks also to our editorial office team at the Royal Society in London, consisting of Editorial Coordinators Jennifer Kren, Buchi Okereafor, Alice Power, Elena Falco and Production Editor Radha Dutia, for the well-organized and high-quality author service and journal production they provide to ensure that *Proceedings B* runs smoothly and efficiently. Finally, I am

especially grateful to Shalene Singh-Shepherd, Senior Publishing Editor of *Proceedings B*, who took over from Rhiannon Meaden at the beginning of 2017. The transition was smooth and I am most grateful for her leadership, organizational skills and good judgement that have made my job as Editor-in-Chief less onerous than it might otherwise be. The London team runs a very efficient and effective operation and *Proceedings B* is fortunate to have a group of such dedicated professionals helping to run our journal.

Data accessibility. This article has no data.

Competing interests. I declare I have no competing interests.

Funding. I received no funding for this study.

References

1. Charlesworth D, Barton NH, Charlesworth B. 2017 The sources of adaptive variation. *Proc. R. Soc. B* **284**, 20162864. (doi:10.1098/rspb.2016.2864)
2. Laland KN, Uller T, Feldman MW, Sterelny K, Müller GB, Moczek A, Jablonka E, Odling-Smee J. 2015 The extended evolutionary synthesis: its structure, assumptions and predictions. *Proc. R. Soc. B* **282**, 20151019. (doi:10.1098/rspb.2015.1019)