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Three years of RNA Families

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Three years ago *RNA Biology* and the Rfam group started a novel experiment.[1,2] This was to create a special RNA Families track for the journal. This track caters for articles describing new RNA families or major updates to established families. At that time the lack of systematic standards for presenting data between journals made it very difficult to extract useful machine-readable data from these articles. To date, *RNA Biology* has published nearly 30 RNA Families articles. These have ranged from updates for famous families such as SRP,[3] tmRNA[4] and RNases P and MRP[5,6] through to novel sRNAs,[7-11] snoRNAs[12-15] and viral elements.[16-18] We have recently started soliciting reviews of notable miRNA families.[19-21] One very interesting example from this batch is from Peter Stadler's lab,[22] where an entire undergraduate lab is credited with contributing to the article. This illustrates that this series of articles can be a useful way of training research students and can also bridge views spanning research groups that have not traditionally collaborated.[4,12]

A number of authors publishing outside the *RNA Biology* track are now following our criteria.[23-27] This is a very promising sign, indicating that the requirements are not too onerous and the research community can see the benefits of consistently formatted and presented data that can then be used across many different data sets and studies.

The 967 Wikipedia articles used by Rfam for sourcing content were viewed 251,544 times in October 2011 alone. The articles for "Transfer RNA," "MicroRNA," "Ribosomal RNA" and "Ribozyme" were viewed 36,750, 30,387, 26,090 and 11,806 times respectively in this period. This shows that the audience for these articles is tremendous and presumably includes students, teachers and members of your funding committee. Therefore, it is our duty as scientists to ensure that the content on these pages is both accurate and up to date. Furthermore, these articles have been edited 19,170 times by 3,058 editors since January 2007. Less than 1% of these edits can be considered vandalism.[28] This illustrates that Wikipedia articles are an invaluable, up-to-date and consistent annotation tool for scientists.

The future of the RNA Families track at RNA Biology seems secure. The excellent staff at Landes Biosciences have continued to support the RNA Families track. They have consistently been generous in extending the open access and free publication model. This makes the RNA Families track a very attractive place to publish research. Future directions for the track may include more reviews of notable microRNA, snoRNA and lncRNA families. Also, entire organism reviews are an area we would like to expand into. The study published by Coral del Val and colleagues covering all the sRNAs from proteobacteria is a nice example of this.[29]

As always, if you have a RNA family you would like to add or update then feel free to make a presubmission inquiry to me at paul.gardner@canterbury.ac.nz.

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