I. Submissions and Decisions: 2011

Number of Submissions 2011: 213. This is an increase of 33 (18%) compared to 2010. This number is still below the peak years of 2007-2009, but the trend of increasing submissions does appear to be continuing so far in 2012 (see below).

Of the 213 submissions, I rejected 60 without review, as Not Appropriate. This is a rather high percentage and an increase compared to last year (28% vs 23%). Ten of the 60 were sent to AEs, who declined to send them out for review and returned them to me with the recommendation of Not Appropriate. The manuscripts rejected under this category cover a very broad range - many are phylogenetic studies that are not of sufficiently general interest, but another large group is submissions that are simply in the wrong scientific discipline (e.g., "systems biology" rather than "systematic biology"). In looking back at the manuscripts in this category, I feel confident that I made the right calls. The primary purpose of editorial rejection is to reduce the reviewing burden on the AEs, Editorial Board members, and outside reviewers, and I do not believe that their time would have been productively used on these manuscripts.

Of the 151 2011 manuscripts sent out for review, I have not yet received AE recommendations for five. Therefore, as of 23 March 2012, we have completed review and issued decisions for 146 of the 2011 submissions.

Of the 146 completed reviews, I concurred with the AE recommendation 126 times (~86% of decisions). This percentage is a bit lower than most recent years. The primary reason for the increase in decisions that deviate from the AE recommendation is my attempt to reduce the use of and more stringently define the role of the Accept with Major Revision category (see below).

Of the 20 times I made a decision that differed from the AE's recommendation, my decision was less favorable for the author in 11 cases. In seven cases the AE recommended Accept/major, but my decision was Reject with resubmission encouraged. In two cases, I declined to offer the option of resubmission, against the AE's recommendation. In one case, the AE recommended Accept/minor, but I felt that the re-writing suggestions were sufficiently important that a stronger signal to the authors was necessary. In

only one case did my decision differ from the AE's recommendation by more than one category. Of the nine manuscripts for which my decision was more favorable to the authors, eight involved bumping a recommendation of Accept/major up to a decision of Accept/minor. In one case, I permitted resubmission despite the AE's recommendation of straight reject (that paper, with the same AE, has now been published).

2011 Decisions: (206)
Accept pending minor revisions: 36 (17%; 11% in 2010; 9% in 2009; 10% in 2008,12% in 2007)
Accept pending major revisions: 20 (10%; 20% in 2010; 25% in 2009; 21% in 2008; 20% in 2007)
Reject, encourage/permit resubmission: 51 (25%; 24% in 2010; 29% in 2009; 30% in 2008; 26% in 2007)
Reject: 39 (19%; 20% in 2010; 20% in 2009; 23% in 2008; 16% in 2007)
Not Appropriate: 60 (28%; 24% in 2010; 17% in 2009; 16% in 2008; 23% in 2007)

Overall acceptance rate: 27% (31% in 2010; 34% in 2009; 31% in 2008; 32% in 2007)
Overall rejection rate: 73% (69% in 2010; 66% in 2009; 69% in 2009; 68% in 2007)

II. Submissions and Decisions: 2012 (as of 3/23/2012).

Manuscripts submitted since 1 Jan 2012: 52 (vs. 37 at the same date last year)
Manuscripts rejected as Not Appropriate without being sent out for review: 15 (29%); rejected without review with a Reject decision: 3 (6%); rejected without review, but with encouragement to resubmit: 1 (this was an interesting comparative analysis, but with obvious problems with the phylogenetic methodology)

2012 Decisions: So far, 6 2012 manuscripts have completed the review process. One was accepted; the rest have been rejected in one form or another.

2012 Manuscripts currently in review: 27

Six of the 2012 manuscripts are "overdue" at some stage of their processing. Five of those are waiting on late reviewers.

III. Manuscript Handling:

We continue to make changes in the flow of manuscripts. A major goal of the changes is to have manuscripts spend less time in non-review editorial functions. To that end, we have completely eliminated the "R1 notes". This was a step just prior to issuing a final acceptance in which the Managing Editor would look over the manuscript for a number of issues/problems, ranging from not following the journal's format to clarity and resolution of figures. That step has been replaced, in part, by a more detailed set of instructions in the email that accompanies a decision of "Accept pending receipt of final changes", and, in part, by the Managing Editor spending a bit more time on papers prior to final export to the publisher.

In 2011 we implemented a system under which OUP puts accepted papers up on the Advanced Access section of the journal's web site as soon as the authors have completed the copyright form. The 'raw' manuscript is replaced later with the typeset, proof-corrected version, once it is finished. As the official date of publication is the date at which a paper appears on the web site, this makes a really big difference in the total time between submission and publication, as perceived by authors. As an example, the paper most recently added to Advance Access as of this writing had its final version submitted by the authors on March 18. I issued the Accept decision on March 19, the paper was exported to OUP on the same day, and it appeared on Advance Access on March 22.

IV. Accept with major revisions

At last summer's editorial meeting, we voted to eliminate the decision category "Accept with major revisions". That has not yet been implemented, and I am not sure that I still want to move all the way to elimination of the category. The problem in the past was that papers returned after receiving the Accept/major decision would, nearly always, be sent by the AE to one or more reviewers. This causes two problems. First, it takes just as much time for reviewers to return a second version as a first. Second, the nature of reviewers is that they find things they want changed, resulting in at least one further round of revision. These issues affected a substantial fraction of total manuscripts. As reported above, from 2008 through 2010 roughly twice as many manuscripts received Accept/major as Accept/minor decisions.

I would like to keep Accept/major, but with its usage being primarily for manuscripts in which the analyses are solid, but the writing needs major work. Certainly any manuscript for which the reviews call for substantial changes to analyses should not be issued even a provisional acceptance, as those new or changed analyses might not reach the same conclusions.

V. Data Archiving:

Implementation of more-or-less automatic integration with Dryad is working. One remaining issue is that of computer software. Although not specifically covered in our current policy, I generally ask authors to place a snapshot of the code for any custom software on Dryad (as it was used to analyze the data for the paper; if it is critical to the results obtained). In most cases this has not been a problem. In a few cases, however, licensing issues have arisen. Dryad requires a very specific form of open-source license (CC0), and some authors have not been able to comply with that particular requirement (even though their software is open-source). I have been flexible and allowed authors with licensing conflicts to host the snapshot on their own server(s), along with a promise to maintain the site for at least a couple of years.

VI. Software for Systematics and Evolution:

After several years of discussion, we have finally added this section to the journal. The goal is to be selective, and publish papers describing software that is expected to have a substantial impact on the field. To help provide rapid review, the section has a dedicated Associate Editor (David Posada), and all manuscripts are reviewed only by one or both of his Editorial Board appointees. Software described in published papers must be open-source, and authors must agree to maintain and support the software for at least two years (the full instructions for the section can be read at the SSB web site). The first two papers published in this section are desciptions of the BEAGLE Application Programming Interface and MrBayes 3.2. So far, the number of submissions has been low, which I think I am OK with. It still may be worth doing a modest amount of advertising / publicity for the section to increase submissions a bit.

VII. Associate Editors

David Posada graciously agreed to become the inaugural AE for the Software for Systematics and Evolution section.

VIII. American vs. English spellings

Journal policy has long (always?) been to use only American spellings. One author has been insisting on being allowed to use British spellings, and has refused to approve proofs until the matter is settled. I am inclined to allow at least a one-time exception for this paper (but have not been in any particular hurry to do so). Is this a matter we want to visit for a general discussion?