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# Open access is worth considering

Robert Lanfear1, Matthew W. Pennell2

1Ecology Evolution and Genetics, Research School of Biology, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, Australia

2Institute for Bioinformatics and Evolutionary Studies, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844, U.S.A.

Corresponding author: Lanfear, R. (rob.lanfear@gmail.com)

In a recent letter, Anurag A. Agrawal [1] outlines his opinions on open access (OA) publishing. In it, he incorrectly conflates OA journals with non-selective journals. Specifically, Agrawal [1] states that "a publication in an open access journal only imparts [the information that it is] ‘not scientifically flawed'", and later that OA journals provide "no stamp of rigor or potential impact". Unfortunately this is a common misconception, and we would like to set the record straight: many OA journals are highly selective.

We compiled data on the publication policies and impact factors of 31 popular and reputable OA journals in biology (summarised in Table 1, full version with publication policies available at [2]). This list is far from exhaustive, and we openly acknowledge that there are many OA journals that are neither popular nor reputable [3], as well as many other reputable journals that don’t appear on our list. The list comprises journals in which we would be happy to publish our own work, and serves only to demonstrate that many OA journals are both selective and high impact.

Our list reveals a diversity of publication policies, ranging from journals that aim to publish valid science regardless of novelty or likely impact (e.g. PLOS ONE, The PeerJ), to those that are at least as selective as the most competitive closed-access journals (e.g. PLOS Biology, BMC Biology, eLife). In total, 22 of the 31 journals in our list apply some kind of selection based on novelty and likely impact. Many OA journals also lead their fields based on metrics such as impact factors. For example, the 1st and 5th ranked journals in the Institute for Scientific Information’s (ISI) 'Biology' category are both OA (PLOS Biology and BMC Biology, with impact factors of 12.7 and 6.6 respectively), as is the 2nd ranked journal in ISI's 'Zoology' category (Frontiers in Zoology, impact factor 3.9).

In summary, a publication in an OA journal will often impart much more than the information that it is not flawed. And to the extent that impact factors can be used to estimate a publication's future citation rate [4], publications in many OA journals should be judged at least as favourably as those in closed access journals.

We agree with Agrawal that researchers should carefully consider their options when deciding where to publish. The decision affects who will see the work, how it (and the researcher who produces it) will be judged, and the rise and fall of scientific publishing models. It is therefore important that we are all aware of journals' publishing policies and reputations, both for our own science and in our judgement of others'. This is particularly important as hiring and granting committees try to keep pace with a rapidly changing publishing landscape.

References

1. Agrawal AA. 2014. Four more reasons to be skeptical of open-access publishing. Trends Plant Sci 19:133.

2. Lanfear, Rob; Pennell, Matthew W (2014): Publication policies of 31 open access publishers in biology. figshare. http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.956240

3. <http://scholarlyoa.com/2014/01/02/list-of-predatory-publishers-2014/>

4. Eyre-Walker A, Stoletzki N. 2013. The assessment of science: the relative merits of post-publication review, the impact factor, and the number of citations. PLoS Biol 11:e1001675.

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| Table 1. Publication polices of 31 open-access publishers in the biological sciencesa | | |
| Journal | Selection for novelty and/or impact | Impact factorb |
| PLOS Medicine | Yes | 15.25 |
| PLOS Biology | Yes | 12.69 |
| PLOS Genetics | Yes | 8.52 |
| PLOS Pathogens | Yes | 8.14 |
| BMC Biology | Yes | 6.53 |
| PLOS Computational Biology | Yes | 4.87 |
| Genome Biology and Evolution | Yes | 4.76 |
| PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases | Yes | 4.57 |
| BMC Genomics | Minor | 4.40 |
| BMC Plant Biology | Minor | 4.35 |
| Evolutionary applications | Yes | 4.15 |
| EvoDevo | Yes | 3.91 |
| Frontiers in Zoology | Minor | 3.87 |
| PLOS One | No | 3.73 |
| BMC Evolutionary Biology | Minor | 3.29 |
| BMC Bioinformatics | Minor | 3.02 |
| Scientific Reports | No | 2.93 |
| BMC Genetics | Minor | 2.81 |
| BMC Developmental Biology | Minor | 2.73 |
| Biology Direct | No | 2.72 |
| Evolutionary bioinformatics | No | 1.23 |
| Ecology and Evolution | No | 1.18 |
| Applications in Plant Sciences | Minor | NA |
| BMC Ecology | Minor | NA |
| Ecosphere | No | NA |
| eLife | Yes | NA |
| Evolution Medicine and Public Health | Yes | NA |
| Frontiers in Genetics | Yes | NA |
| PeerJ | No | NA |
| PLOS Currents | No | NA |
| F1000 Research | No | NA |

aPublication policies with respect to whether or not journals select articles based on novelty and perceived impact. Journals are ranked by impact factor, and those without impact factors are marked ‘NA’.

bSource: 2012 Journal Citation Reports©, published by Thomson Reuters