

June 2023 Report

Editor-In-Chief Systematic Biology

I took over as only Editor-in-Chief in January 2022, replacing Dr Bryan Carstens. This is a summary of the main activities carried out and some problems we experienced.

As of June 2023, **we have published three issues**, belonging to Volume 72 (Year 2023):

Issue 1 (<https://academic.oup.com/sysbio/issue/72/1>). Published in May 2023. Corresponding to the first issue of 2023 (January 2023). Contains 17 articles (248 pages). The dates of acceptance were between February 2022 and January 2023. Divided into the following categories: 5 Spotlights, 14 Regular articles, 2 Points of View, and 1 Software for Systematics and Evolution

Issue 2 (<https://academic.oup.com/sysbio/issue/72/2>). Published in June 2023. Corresponding to the second issue of 2023 (March 2023). Contained 17 articles (248 pages). Divided into the following categories: 2 Spotlights, 13 Regular articles, 1 Point of View, and 1 Correction.

Issue 3 (<https://academic.oup.com/sysbio/issue/72/3>). ISSN 1063-5157. Published in June 2023. Corresponding to the third issue of 2023 (May 2023). Contained 18 articles (248 pages). Divided into the following categories: 2 Spotlights, 14 Regular articles, 1 Point of View, and 1 Correction.

As informed in previous meetings, we experienced serious delays in the production chain. Oxford University Press changed the typesetters company to NewGen (with whom they have worked earlier for other journals). This resulted in errors in DOI assignment, “missing” manuscripts, delays to send the printproofs to the authors of accepted manuscripts (sometimes several months). On my part, I experienced difficulties in the communication with the typesetters, and a sometimes clumsy system to send me the final printproofs, cover, etc; multiple versions of the first two issues circulated over two months, from April to May 2023.

One of the most difficult tasks has been to fix the Cover: the composition of the Editorial Board and the Systematic Biology Executive Council had not been updated since the first issue of 2021. In Issue 72(1), the order of articles per category did not follow the traditional Spotlight, Regular, Point of View, Software. Instead, articles were printed according to date of print proof acceptance, and some articles were included in the wrong category. As of Issue 72 (2), that was fixed after considerable efforts. Issue 72(3) is printed with the same cover image as Issue 72(2). I have asked OUP to change this, at least online; I selected the cover image for this issue in May 25th, so there has been again an issue with communication.

The situation started improving after April 2023 when Oxford University Press hired a new Production Assistant UC, who is in charge of overseeing the typesetters. This is reflected in the fact that we have now have published three issues in less than three months and have one in production, Issue 72(4), with expected date in June (15 articles, 236 pages). The reason for the expected lower number of pages on this issue responds to OUP concerns that we might run out of accepted manuscripts, due to the lower number of submissions in 2023 (commented in the OUP Publisher Report). I do not share this concern, as at least 20 manuscripts have been accepted already, and the rate of acceptance has increased.

On the other hand, OUP has promised to introduce a new tool that will allow for authors to revise their printproofs online, with considerable less hassle of printproofs been sent back and

forth to typesetters. This tool is similar to others available in journals published by Wiley, and seems to be very efficient.

Editorial Board: I have again expanded the Editorial Board with the addition of new members, who started along 2023: Bastien Boussau, Isaac Overcast, Siavash Mirarab, Nathan Whelan. But we also AEs who stepped down: Mark Holder, Jake Esseltyn, Ken Halanaych, Vanessa González. As of now, there are 46 Associate Editors. The number of European AEs have expanded considerably and there is one AE from a Brazilian institution (Manolo Perez). The expansion responded to the need to have editors covering new fields such as machine learning, and diminishing the burden on the current editors.

I will have the **first Editorial Meeting on June 22nd 2023**, which will be attended by 15 AEs in person and 2 online if possible: the majority of AEs attending work on US institutions. For that reason, and taking the opportunity given by my participation in the Mathematical Computational Biology Evolutionary Meeting in Corsica (June 12-16th), I had an informal meeting with the AEs (4 European, 1 Brazilian) attending the conference. We discussed several topics that will be also discussed during the Evolution meeting. Below. I summarize the main content for them.

1. Adopt a new category for recommendation: Accept with Major Revision. Allow only 4-3 months to submit after this decision. The reason for allowing such a short time is that a "Reject, encourage resubmission" decision count as "rejection", so they are not included in the statistics for accepted papers; if they were, our statistics will be really bad since many authors need a long time to carry out our revisions and resubmissions, sometimes more than one year.
2. Remove the Spotlight article category, which seems to be creating major confusion among reviewers and authors. One AE commented he heard that Spotlights were the "entrance path" for "not-so-strong" papers that would normally not be published in SB. The name was also misleading as it seemed to imply these are "excellent, spotlight articles". Instead, there was a suggestion for a "short research paper" category or "Letters", short papers aimed for quick reporting, for example, a simulation study showing some weakness on a method, but whose scope is not enough to merit a regular research article.
3. Software Manuscripts: There was a discussion on whether they belong to SB (some AEs expressed discontent with this category). However, the suggestion is that these papers help the community of developers to get recognition, who are not theoreticians but whose work helps other systematists. The veto against "parsimony" software packages should be removed.
4. Mathematical Theoretical papers: Purely theoretical work should be published in Syst Biol? The conclusion is that if there is a biological motivation behind, these should be considered, but asking the authors to provide enough background, be legible by our empirical readers, and perhaps show some application.
5. Epidemiology: Again, some heated discussion. I have AEs in favor and against. Personally; I think we cannot discard them per se, but we cannot shift either into an epidemiology journal (virologists publish so much!). At the same time, many phylogenetic methods were originally born in the field of epidemiology and viceversa (the BDSKY model, the tip dating approach for FBD, BD model with serial sampling, phylogeography random walks, online phylogenetics, approximate pseudo likelihood in phylodynamics, etc). My view is that if the paper provides some methodological novelty, it should be considered.
6. Point of View: Unclear what is a POV for some editors. Should a POV be concerned only with arguments and debate, or do we allow a Material and Method sections and ask authors to provide proof of their arguments using simulations? Should a POV be always general in scope? Do we allow "systematic debates" that are taxonomically narrow? My view is that a POV can have some methodological results but it should be not be a regular paper-in-disguise: simulations aimed to provide new arguments are allowed.

Finally, I have been attending the **Editors' Briefings meetings** aimed to provide advice and input for the EICs of journals published by OUP. The most useful was the one dedicated to how to effectively manage the Editorial Board, especially the editor hierarchy. A recommendation to include a second level of handling editors, Deputy EICs, between the EIC and the AEs was stressed, as an efficient way to improve manuscript turnover. This was already discussed in our previous SSB Executive meetings. After some efforts, I have managed to secure the help of Professor Lars Jermiin, who volunteer to work as Deputy EIC. We already have two meetings with useful input, and I will push this matter forward with the Editorial Board, to secure a second EIC.