

Editor in Chief 2019 Report

This document describes my main activities during 2019. By December of 2019, the handover of EiC duties from Tom Near to myself is complete. I am grateful for all of the advice and assistance that Tom offered me during the last year. I've been taking notes and will work on building on what Tom did during the next couple of years to ensure a smooth transition to the EiC who comes after me. A summary of submissions and decisions is provided below:

- I. Submissions & Decisions: We received 270 original submissions and 129 revisions in 2019, a number that is down slightly from 2018. Our time to first decision on these manuscripts averaged 62 days but varied considerably among manuscript types. We were fairly quick at identifying submissions that are not appropriate for the journal (9 days), while submissions that went to review averaged between 62 and 82 days depending on the final decision. We continue to try to balance an expediency and thoroughness in the review process.
- II. Manuscript handling. Refer to the Publisher's and Virtual Editorial Office report for details on how OUP handles accepted manuscripts, data on manuscript submissions, turnaround time, etc. In short, accepted manuscripts are made available via the journal web site's "Advance Access" section in less than a week once the authors complete the copyright form.
- III. Oxford University Press – Julia McDonnell continues in her position as Publisher at OUP for *Systematic Biology*. Julia has been a remarkable source of help to me as I learned how to do the various tasks associated with the EiC position and provides excellent support to *Systematic Biology* as a whole. The society is fortunate to have her working on behalf of our journal.
- IV. Associate Editor News and Workloads
 - a. We currently have 55 Associate Editors, which includes the AEs that were recruited in 2019. This allows each AE to have a moderate workload of 4.3 (+/- 1.7) manuscripts per year. We accepted just under 42% of all manuscripts submitted to the journal in 2019.
 - b. New AEs recruited. I have recruited several new AEs, including Lisa Barrow, Jeremy Beaulieu, Rayna Bell, Jason Bond, Liliana Davalos, Jake Esselstyn, Sara Ruane, Claudia Solis-Lemus, and April Wright. I will continue to recruit the best scientists that I can to serve this vital role.
 - c. Optimal number of AEs. I would like input from the council on the optimal number of AEs.

In addition to the normal activities associated with reviewing and publishing manuscripts in *Systematic Biology*, we initiated a new category of manuscript:

Spotlights are papers that focus on an empirical system. They could range from a broad phylogenetic investigation of a large clade to a species delimitation investigation on the phylogeographic scale. In any case, Spotlights will be characterized by their adoption of leading-edge methods and their careful approach to data collection and analysis but will focus on the focal group rather than the methodology. Spotlights need to appeal to a broad audience, for example by illustrating how the focal system illustrates key evolutionary processes but should be primarily about the system rather than the methods. While we encourage authors to conduct thorough analyses and describe them in detail, authors will be asked to limit Spotlights to 6 manuscript pages and make use of supplemental material for the detailed description of every setting and parameter used in the analysis. Spotlights should contain no more than 4 figures or tables.

The goal of the Spotlight category is to (a) increase membership by (b) making publication in the premier systematics journal something that all systematists can aspire to.

I also attended Oxford Journal Days in early December, along with the editors of other OUP publications. This was an informative event, and particularly relevant due to the current publishing environment and discussion (both past and future) regarding open access publication.

Objectives for 2020

1. Work with Dan Rabosky and Ryan Folk to organize a set of protocols and standards for our journals to implement regarding data accessibility and code sharing. The system in place currently is a little haphazard and relies on the good faith of the authors. Usually, this works well but there are some notable exceptions. Our goal is to have a proposal for our AEs to approve at the 2020 Evolution Meeting.
2. Work with OUP to squeeze out as much space in the journal as we can, and work with authors to reduce manuscript length. Article length has steadily increased over the last decade (Figure 1), and this results in a decrease of the total number of manuscripts that we can publish. It also is a trend that is ultimately not sustainable. Since my long-term goal is to increase the number of papers we publish while maintaining their high quality, a judicious use of supplemental materials and some editorial effort will enable us to reverse this trend and, coupled with OUPs design efforts, hopefully allow us to fit an extra paper or two into each issue. As part of this effort, I am using the unique persuasive ability that is inherent to my position to *encourage* authors to trim overly long submissions.

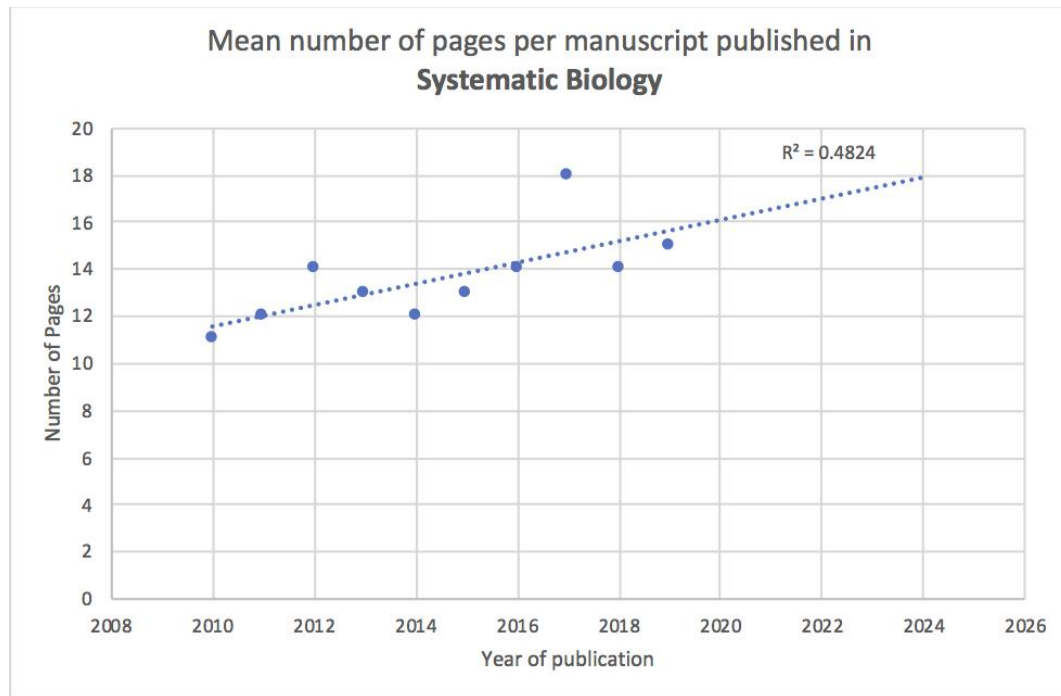


Figure 1. Average number of pages per manuscript during the 2010s.

3. Develop **memorandas of understanding** with other OUP journals that publish phylogenies for cascading manuscript review. The goal of this initiative is to increase the number of submissions that we receive from empirical taxonomists.

Currently, Scott Sillett of *The Auk* and would approval for such a *memorandum* (Appendix I).

4. Launch a **new journal** for the Society of Systematic Biologists. As of January, I have been appointed as a faculty fellow with the OSU Library system. The OSU library is part of a broader consortium that is interested in providing scientists with alternative venues for publication of online-only open-access manuscripts. I am curious about this effort, and the broader landscape of publishing in general, and accepted this appointment in part because they are buying out my teaching and service to my TIU. This should allow me to have more time to pursue this goal. In addition to my role as an ambassador and liaison between the library and other academics on campus who serve as journal editors, the appointment will allow me to develop and launch a new journal that will be published by the OSU Library on behalf of the Society of Systematic Biologists. My goal here is not to compete with *Systematic Biology*, but to publish work that is valuable to our members and not likely to be published in *Systematic Biology* or our competitor journals. A quick list of the manuscript types that we should consider includes:

- (i) publications with undergraduates as the lead author
- (ii) species description / revisions
- (iii) species monographs
- (iv) data papers (in-depth descriptions of data sets that can be cited)
- (v) posters (organized into collections from the SSB / Evolution meetings)

The library has invested in all of the infrastructure that is needed to review, publish, archive, register (i.e., ISBN, DOI, Scholarly Metrics), and distribute these manuscripts. They have committed to maintaining any of our published work while the OSU Library as an institution exists. In order to enact this plan, we will need a budget to pay for editorial assistance and developing the LaTeX templates that will be used for publishing. Based on the best information that I have at this time, a **budget of \$23,500 for 2020** will be needed.

Editorial Assistance (\$12,000)

I have identified an undergraduate science major named Dinah Ward who hopes to have a career in scientific publishing. Dinah is scheduled to graduate in May of 2022. My plan is to hire her to serve as the managing editor for this new journal. The usual rate of pay for undergrads in lab jobs at OSU is \$11-14 per hour, but I would like to pay Dinah \$15 per hour to reflect the greater responsibilities that she will have in this new position. I request \$13,000 for 2020 to pay her to work between 15 – 20 hours a week. Using office space donated by the OSU Library, Dinah will learn to use the *Open Journal Software* system and process the initial submissions. I would also ask Dinah to work with Felipe Zapata and the Awards Committee so that she can help them with the processing of submissions and reviews.

LaTeX Typesetting (\$6400)

Our goal is to develop typesetting templates with both Microsoft Word and LaTeX that can be used for each of our manuscript categories. I will assemble an ad hoc committee to develop these templates, and we will use a [commercial service](#) that has been previously used by PLoS, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and others. The budgeted amount pays for 2 full weeks of typesetting service and [development](#), a number suggested as appropriate after a brief consultation with the service.

Copy editing (\$3000)

It is unclear how to best conduct the copy editing on selected manuscripts. Dinah Ward has some experience with Copy Editing, and there are several services that exist to connect freelance editors to those that would like to employ them for jobs. The budgeted amount will allow us to explore a couple of these services as manuscripts are submitted. Ultimately, we would like to develop relationships with particular people so that they can be trained to work with the specialized content of our papers. Dinah Ward will serve as the contact person to coordinate copy editing between the authors and the freelance editors.

Journal Logo Design (\$600)

Abbie Zimmer and Brittany Cummings will be hired to design a logo for our new journal. Abbie and Brittany, who designed the logo for the SSB meeting in Columbus and Gainesville, respectively, will be asked to work together on a logo design for the new journal.

Promotional materials (\$1500)

We will print stickers and other promotional materials to advertise the new journal at the Evolution meeting in Cleveland and in other venues. We will also purchase an Exhibitor booth

so that Dinah can attend the meeting and talk with people about the new journal. I will help her with this and ask the AEs to contribute time to the booth as well.

My goal is to publish our first issue in January of 2021. If this proposal is approved, a planned timeline of activities is as follows:

February 2020. Hire and onboarding of Dinah Ward. Work with Dinah in developing a detailed task list. Work with Dinah to (i) train her in LaTeX, (ii) hire LaTeX typesetting service. Work with Dinah to solicit ideas for manuscript categories and develop detailed descriptions of these categories. Work with Dinah to solicit names from our membership for the new journal. Perhaps we can have a vote among our members to choose the name. Work with Communications committee to dedicate email addresses for key personnel.

March 2020. LaTeX typesetting development complete. Identify Associate Editors for each manuscript category. Ask SSB members to vote on a name for the new journal. Hire Abbie and Brittany to design a logo for the new journal. Develop a policy for data and script access.

April 2020. Announce new journal, issue a call for submissions. We will start with the poster category because these will not require copy editing and type setting, and then roll out new categories as being open for submission on a bi-weekly basis.

May 2020. Continue roll out of journal categories and solicitation of submissions. Invite submissions for some categories (such as those papers with undergraduates as lead authors) to prime this process. Begin to help awards committee process submissions and reviews (Dinah).

June 2020. Official launch of new journal at Evolution meeting. Continue processing manuscripts

July 2020 – December 2020. Continue processing manuscripts. In December, Dinah will be asked to prepare a report to the SSB Council's January 2021 meeting which will contain documentation of all activities and expenses to date. At this time, we will also prepare (i) a 2021 budget request, and (ii) a proposal for manuscript fees, and (iii) a suggested schedule of publication for the journal.

January 2021. First issue published. Bryan begins sabbatical (but continues editorial work). Bryan begins second year as EiC for *Systematic Biology*.



The Society of Systematic Biologists

Bryan Carstens
Professor

carstens.12@osu.edu
<http://carstenslab.org.ohio-state.edu/>

T. Scott Sillett
Editor-in-Chief
The Auk: Ornithological Advances
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, DC USA
ssillett@americanornithology.org

January 9th, 2020

Dear Scott,

I write to formalize the conversation that we started last month regarding an agreement on cascading manuscript submission. Pending approval of The American Ornithological Society and the Society of Systematic Biologists, we agree to provide authors with an option to share reviews between our journals via a process that would resemble the following:

- i. At that time of manuscript submission to *Systematic Biology*, authors would select a box requesting that reviews of their manuscript would be made available to editors of *The Auk* in the event that *Systematic Biology* does not decide to publish their manuscript.
- ii. *Systematic Biology* would then seek the approval of the reviewers for the potential sharing of these reviews as the review is requested. Reviewers would be asked to consent to this sharing of confidential information between our editorial teams.
- iii. In the event that a manuscript is rejected from *Systematic Biology*, the authors would be asked if they would like to transmit their reviews to *The Auk*. If they answer in the affirmative, these reviews would be made available to your editorial team on request.
- iv. In the event that the manuscript is accepted for publication in *The Auk*, your editorial team would ask the authors if they would consider acknowledging the reviewers at *Systematic Biology* provided they felt that the manuscript was improved by going through our review process.

Thank you for your willingness to work with *Systematic Biology* on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Bryan Carstens