

## EDITORIAL

**Journal of Ecology News****David J. Gibson<sup>1\*</sup>, Amy T. Austin<sup>2</sup>, Richard D. Bardgett<sup>3</sup>, Mark Rees<sup>4</sup>, Andrea Baier<sup>5</sup> and Lauren Sandhu<sup>5</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Department of Plant Biology, Center for Ecology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-6509, USA;<sup>2</sup>Facultad de Agronomía, University of Buenos Aires and IFEVA, Buenos Aires, Argentina; <sup>3</sup>Faculty of Life Sciences, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PT, UK; <sup>4</sup>Department of Animal and Plant Sciences, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK; and <sup>5</sup>British Ecological Society, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London WC1N 2JU, UK**Moving forward from Centenary Celebrations**

The last couple of years have been quite hectic, celebrating first our *Journal* Centenary and then the British Ecological Society's own Centenary. While still breathless, we have endeavoured to maintain the momentum as we move into the next 100 years. The publishing world is changing fast, and to keep up, we are moving forward with new initiatives.

Like all the BES journals, we have, since the start of 2014, been requiring the authors of all papers to archive the data underlying the presented results (Norman 2014). Basically, we expect the archived data to be sufficient for a reader to be able to recreate the analysis, figures and tables presented in the paper. See our Author Guidelines for full details, which can be found on the *Journal's* homepage.

Our publisher Wiley-Blackwell also brought a few other initiatives online, such as the availability for all articles of the Enhanced HTML Article and Enhanced PDF and the Altmetric donut (more about this below). The Enhanced Article and PDF provide greater functionality for viewing an article. Along with the journal app launched last year, journal articles can now be accessed across a wide variety of platforms including tablets and mobile devices. We continue to seek to employ the latest in digital publishing.

**New initiative: Commentary papers**

We have introduced a new type of article in the *Journal*: a Commentary paper. As stated in our Author Guidelines, Commentaries are short positive assessments of an article that appears in the same issue, highlighting that article's scientific significance. Commentaries are commissioned by the *Journal* Editors and are usually written by one of the reviewers of the article they refer to. Our first Commentary paper is by Mark Scriber (Scriber 2015) and highlights and accompanies Chabaane *et al.*'s (2015) article 'Impact of exotic insect herbivores on native tritrophic interactions: a case study of the African cotton leafworm, *Spodoptera littoralis*, and insects associated with the field mustard *Brassica rapa*' (Fig. 1). Both of these articles appear in the first issue of this year.

\*Correspondence author. E-mail: dgibson@plant.siu.edu

**Impact and access**

Our ISI<sup>®</sup> impact factor went up again in 2014 to an unprecedented 5.694 placing the *Journal* 12th of 140 ecology titles and 12th of 196 plant sciences titles. We are justifiably proud of the *Journal's* standing according to this metric which has shown continued increase over the last few years.

Other new and different metrics of journal impact are now being reported; one of them is the Altmetric score. As a composite metric that evaluates the uptake of an article through social media, Altmetrics offer a different view of journal impact (see David Gibson's post about these on the *Journal of Ecology* blog <http://bit.ly/1rVKFyb>). Altmetric scores vary among papers published in the *Journal* with high scores reflecting broad reach of an article. For example, FitzJohn *et al.*'s (2014) paper 'How much of the world is woody' that only came out in the September issue already has – at the time of writing – an altmetric score of 81, 4th highest ever for a *Journal of Ecology* paper based upon mentions in news media stories, blog posts, tweets from accounts with over 60 000 combined followers, Facebook wall posts, Google+ posts, Mendeley and CiteULike users. Overall, this paper is in the 99th percentile of over 2.5 million articles tracked across all journals. Analysis of Altmetric scores across scientific fields has shown a weakly positive relationship with citations, suggesting their value as a complementary tool for research evaluation reflecting impact among various groups of readers (Costas, Zahedi & Wouters 2014).

**Submissions and the review process**

Submissions to the *Journal* are up (close to 700 at time of writing) and healthy. We continue to reject just over 80% of submissions with approximately 52.4% papers rejected without sending them to outside review. The latter papers are evaluated by a Senior Editor and in most cases also by an Associate Editor and are rejected because they may be out of scope, flawed or on a relatively unimportant or already well-researched topic. The wide scope of expertise represented by our Associate Editors (see Editorial Board, below) ensures



**Fig. 1.** African cotton leafworm (*Spodoptera littoralis*) larvae feeding on leaf material (image from Chabaane *et al.* 2015).

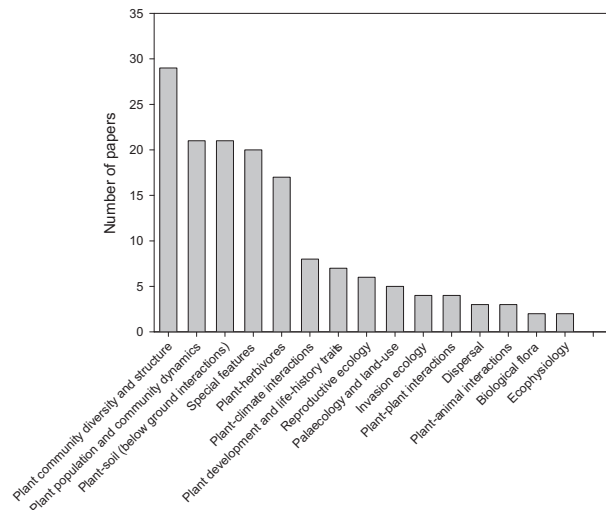
that we can authoritatively judge most papers with a short turnaround time.

Increasingly, authors of rejected papers are taking up the opportunity for their manuscript to be referred with reviews to our sister cascade journal, *Ecology & Evolution*. So far, 176 papers have been referred from *Journal of Ecology* in this way, with 15 being transferred, a transfer rate of 9%.

## Content

The journal publishes a wide variety of papers on all aspects of plant ecology, including algae and fungi. In 2014, the 152 published papers were roughly classified in 15 categories in the table of contents for each issue, including Biological Flora of the British Isles accounts and Special Feature papers (but not including Editorials). Twenty-nine papers classified under the heading *Determinants of plant community diversity and structure* comprised the largest category, followed by 21 papers classified as *Plant population and community dynamics* and *Plant–soil (below-ground) interactions*, respectively (Fig. 2). There is a long tail of ‘rare’ papers, including those in categories *Ecophysiology*, *Dispersal* and *Plant–plant Interactions*. This summary of the topics covered in papers published in the *Journal* highlights the traditional strength of the *Journal* in autecology. Moving forward, we would welcome more above-ground ecosystem ecology papers to complement the large number of below-ground plant–soil papers that we publish, and although not shown in the categories here, more papers representing aquatic ecosystems are encouraged.

Special Features continue to be a very important part of the *Journal*. These focused collections of papers present the most recent and up-to-date research on topics that the Editors feel are at the forefront of our discipline. In 2014, we published three Special Features accompanied by Editorials:



**Fig. 2.** Numbers of papers published in *Journal of Ecology* in 2014 according to categories used in the Journal table of contents.

‘The tree of life in ecosystems: Evolution in plant effects on carbon and nutrient cycling’ (Cornelissen & Cornwell 2014)

‘Meta-analysis in plant ecology’ (Gómez-Aparicio & Lortie 2014)

‘Grass-woodland transitions: Determinants and consequences for ecosystem functioning and provisioning of services’ (Sala & Maestre 2014)

We anticipate three Special Features in 2015 which are in various stages of planning:

‘Forest Resilience, tipping points and global change processes’ (Reyer *et al.* 2015) in this issue

‘Eco-evolutionary dynamics’ (provisional title) guest edited by Richard Shefferson and Roberto Salguero-Gomez

‘Whether in life or in death: fresh perspectives on how plants affect biogeochemical cycling’ to be edited by Amy Austin and Amy Zanne.

Topics for new Special Features are always welcome, and prospective guest editors should contact the Editorial Office with inquiries and ideas. If you are organizing a symposium or special session of presentations at a meeting, consider whether or not some of the presentations may be suitable for a Special Feature.

As a follow-up from Sutherland *et al.*’s (2013) paper ‘Identification of 100 fundamental ecological questions’, we were pleased to publish ‘Looking forward through the past: identification of 50 priority research questions in palaeoecology’ by Seddon *et al.* (2014). Both of these papers provide the discipline with a road map for the future and have been well received.

Three Biological Flora of the British Isles accounts were published in 2014, the orchid marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris* (Jacquemyn, Brys & Hutchings 2014), sea holly *Eryngium maritimum* (Isermann & Rooney 2014) and butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus* (Thomas & Mukassabi 2014). Tony Davy is the Biological Flora Editor and is always pleased to receive inquiries from authors interested in preparing a new account.

### Journal of Ecology in the news in 2014

In addition to FitzJohn *et al.*'s (2014) paper already mentioned, several of the *Journal*'s papers attracted welcome media attention in 2014 including Gallegos, Hensen & Schleuning's (2014) study euphemistically referred to in the press as 'Ants plant tomorrow's rainforest'. Ants were in the news again with Warren, Giladi & Bradford's (2014) paper that ran in several news outlets under the headline 'Plants compete for friendly ants'. Banin *et al.*'s (2014) study on tropical forest wood production and carbon cycling was publicized through the media under the headline 'Super-charged tropical trees'. Finally, from a couple of years ago, we are proud to now report that Freschet, Aerts & Cornelissen's (2012) paper was awarded the 'Prix La Recherche 2013 – Environnement par maglarecherche' by the popular French science magazine 'La Recherche' for their work on litter decomposition reported as 'Influence de la diversité fonctionnelle des plantes sur la décomposition des matières organiques'. The award ceremony can be viewed (in French) at: <http://goo.gl/dm1sM1>.

### The Editorial Board

We welcome the addition of the following new Associate Editors (AEs) in 2014: Ellen Damschen (re-joined the board), Liesje Mommer, Gabriela Nardoto, Alison Power, Akiko Satake and Shurong Zhou. These new AEs have allowed us to enhance our editorial coverage of several key topics (e.g. tropical ecosystems, pathogens, modelling and below-ground interactions) and our geographic reach including China, Japan and South America. In addition, these ecologists help improve our representation of women on the board from around the globe. Related to this, the *Journal* published a wide-ranging Virtual Issue on *Ecology in China* (中国生态学) highlighting work published in the *Journal* on ground-breaking ecological research done in China. This Virtual Issue complements the *Ecología en América del Sur* Virtual Issue that we published last year.

All our AEs work very hard to help us ensure that the *Journal* publishes the very best ecological work, and we thank them for their insightful handling of manuscripts. We

were pleased that Editors Amy Austin and David Gibson, along with Managing Editor Andrea Baier, were able to discuss *Journal* matters over dinner with 13 AEs at the Annual Meeting of the Ecological Society of America in Sacramento, California, in August.

Two AEs stepped down from the board this year, Scott Chamberlain and Dan Flynn. We thank them both for their fine work on behalf of the *Journal*.

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