

Editorial



Cite this article: Barrett SCH. 2018

Proceedings B 2018: the year in review.

Proc. R. Soc. B **285**: 20182590.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2018.2590>

Proceedings B continues to be one of the leading journals in the biological sciences, with a well-deserved reputation for rapid publication of exciting new research of broad appeal. As we approach the end of 2018, I am pleased to report on another successful year, with general improvements in our publication metrics, the diversification of our editorial board in terms of gender representation and geographical reach, and several innovations that I discuss below. We continue to promote novel research of general significance covering a wide range of topics and scales, from global change biology to genomics. Many of our articles place organisms and the environments in which they occur at centre stage, thus maintaining our long-standing tradition as the leading journal in 'organismal biology'. *Proceedings B* receives substantially more interesting submissions that we can possibly publish, therefore competition for space in the journal is fierce. Our talented board of 134 associate editors and seven editors gives preference to novelty and generality, rejecting articles that simply confirm earlier findings, or that are too narrow in focus to appeal to more than a few specialists.

Up until the end of October, shortly before this article was written, we had received 2370 submissions, of which 79% were rejected and 497 accepted. Articles took on average 29 days from the date of submission to first decision, 69 days to final acceptance and 93 days to online publication; and therefore 24 days from final decision to online publication. These time periods are a general improvement from 2017 and all previous years, indicating that *Proceedings B* is maintaining its reputation for fast and efficient publication of articles without compromising critical review. Submissions to the journal in 2018 were comparable with the same time period in 2017, and our current projections are approximately 2844 submissions by the end of the year. The number of open access articles so far this year is 104, making up 21% of all accepted manuscripts. We receive articles from numerous geographical regions, with the largest number of submissions to date this year coming from USA (584), UK (339), China (192), Australia (156), Germany (150), Canada (130), Japan (100), France (95) and Switzerland (71). We are hopeful that the recent recruitments to the editorial board from South America, Africa and the Asian subcontinent will raise the profile of the journal in these regions. Citation metrics for *Proceedings B* remain competitive and similar to last year, with an Impact Factor of 4.847, and the journal is ranked 9th out of 85 journals in the Journal Citation Reports category for 'Biology'.

One of the most attractive features of *Proceedings B* is that we publish review articles that provide novel syntheses of emerging topics in biology. These are generally well cited and often influential. This year our reviews editor Innes Cuthill has done an outstanding job of attracting articles on a diversity of topics, and so far in 2018 the journal has 69 proposals accepted and 49 submitted. To the end of October, 25 reviews were published, an increase from 20 in the same time period in 2017. We have made a considerable effort to promote reviews in *Proceedings B* using social media and this had led to an increase in both proposals and submissions. In addition, the new template for author proposals has helped to streamline the editorial process and has allowed us to assess their quality more easily.

Each year, *Proceedings B* publishes a contribution from the *Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution*, alternating between the Presidential Address and an article by the recipient of the society's President's Award. In 2018, we published an intriguing review [1] by past president Judy Meyers (University of British Columbia) on one of nature's great mysteries: the ecological mechanisms causing cyclic dynamics in northern ecosystems of a variety of animals including

snowshoe hares, voles, lemmings, forest Lepidoptera and grouse (<http://rsob.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/285/1875/20172841>). The review [2] 'Adaption, speciation and extinction in the Anthropocene' by Sarah Otto (University of British Columbia), a Presidential Award winner, has just appeared online (<http://rsob.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/285/1891/20182047?cpetoc>), and concerns how organisms respond to anthropogenic changes and the role of evolution in their responses to these novel challenges. Our annual Darwin review this year, 'Evolutionary radiations and angiosperm phylogeny' by Pamela Soltis and colleagues (University of Florida), looks at the patterns and timing of adaptive radiations in flowering plants and addresses the enduring problem of Darwin's 'abominable mystery' [3].

Each year *Proceedings B* publishes one or two Special Features comprising a timely collection of articles on a specific theme on any topic across the biological sciences. All content is freely available on publication. In 2018, we published a high successful special feature on 'The evolution of city life' [4] (<http://rsob.royalsocietypublishing.org/special-features>) edited by Marc Johnson, Ruth Rivkin and James Santangelo (University of Toronto), a collection of 15 articles about how natural selection associated with urban living influences the evolution of species with which we share cities. Because cities are one of the fastest growing ecosystems on Earth, influencing a host of environmental factors, this volume provides a much-needed glimpse into the evolutionary trajectories of urban life and presages what is likely to become one of the 'hottest' areas in evolutionary biology in the decades to come. Several media outlets drew attention to the publication of this special feature and you can read more about its content at the Royal Society blog (<https://blogs.royalsociety.org/publishing/the-evolution-of-city-life>). Our articles are regularly picked up by media outlets (like the BBC and the *Guardian* newspaper) and highlighted for the general public. *Proceedings B* also promotes its newsworthy content on social media channels like Twitter and Facebook. We often write blogs on popular articles, which help to improve the visibility and impact of our articles. Our authors appreciate these promotions as they go a long way to increase our readership and article downloads.

We have recently extended our portfolio of article categories at *Proceedings B* with the introduction of 'Evidence Synthesis' papers, and our editor Gary Carvalho is handling submissions in this category. Articles should involve a synthesis of published information relevant to a specific policy question and be written in such a way that they are comprehensible to non-specialists and policymakers, thus enabling them to make informed decisions. We envision articles on all aspects of biology and the environment (e.g. climate change, food security, health and disease, and the management of natural resources). For more information, see Gary's article on Evidence Synthesis [5] (<http://rsob.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/285/1878/20180858>), and the blog on this initiative by our publishing editor Shalene Singh-Shepherd (<https://blogs.royalsociety.org/publishing/evidence-synthesis-articles>). We have received five Evidence Synthesis submissions so far and look forward to receiving more in the future on topics of pressing interest to policymakers.

Perhaps the most significant new development at *Proceedings B* is the mandatory publication of peer review reports (editor and reviewer reports, author responses and decision letter) as supplemental materials along with the published article. This new feature will be introduced on 1 January 2019. Mandatory open peer review has several potential benefits including fostering of greater transparency and trust in the peer review process, improved standards of reviewing, opportunities for post-publication assessment and commentary, and the pedagogic value that such reviews will provide, especially to young scientists. Mandatory open peer review was successfully implemented in the Royal Society's journal *Open Biology* in 2017, and there is no evidence that it has had negative effects on publication times or efforts to obtain referees from the scientific community to review manuscripts. *Proceedings B* will follow the same model as *Open Biology*, in which reviewers and editors have the option of signing their names to their comments, but this is not required. More information on mandatory open peer review is available at the Royal Society Publishing blog (<https://blogs.royalsociety.org/publishing/publication-of-peer-review-reports>).

We continue to work hard to redress gender imbalance on the editorial board of *Proceedings B* so that it reflects the scientific community we serve. We have recently recruited 19 new associate editors (AEs) to replace retiring members and of these 11 are women. By January 2019, the board will be composed of 142 AEs, of which 46% are female and 54% are male. I would like to welcome all new AEs to the editorial board and I look forward to interacting with you during your time with us.

I am especially pleased that we have also been able to recruit two new editors to *Proceedings B*: Sarah Brosnan (Georgia State University) and John Hutchinson (Royal Veterinary College, University of London), both of whom served as AEs for the journal, and will now join our existing group of seven editors. Sarah works on animal behaviour, especially the mechanisms underlying decision making in non-human primates, and John's research focuses on evolutionary biomechanics, particularly the question of how locomotion evolved in different groups of large land vertebrates. The addition of Sarah and John diversifies the expertise represented among the deciding editors, and increasing the size of the editorial group should improve the speed with which we can make final decisions on papers submitted to the journal.

I would like to conclude by giving my sincere thanks to all editorial board members for their sound judgement and service to the journal, especially all AEs who will retire at the end of this year. Thanks also to our editorial office team at the Royal Society in London, consisting of editorial coordinators Jennifer Kren, Buchi Okerefor, Elena Falco, Callum Shoosmith and production editor Simon Clackson for their dedication in making sure that *Proceedings B* runs smoothly and efficiently. Finally, I am especially grateful to Shalene Singh-Shepherd, publishing editor of *Proceedings B*, for her sound judgement and promptness in dealing with the numerous issues that arise in a journal of this size and scope. Her efforts are much appreciated by the entire editorial and office staff, and certainly make my job as editor-in-chief more pleasurable and rewarding.

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