

EDITORIAL

The changing of the guard

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Since its humble beginnings in 1923, Journal of Experimental Biology (JEB) has not only established itself as the leading journal in its field but also helped to support scientists from a broad range of scientific interests with the goal of promoting the ‘comparative approach’ in mainstream physiology.

During JEB’s nearly 100-year history, I am only the eighth Editor-in-Chief (EiC). To me, this means that my predecessors must have enjoyed this role as much as I have throughout my tenure. I was originally invited to join JEB as an Editor in 1995 by my predecessor, Bob Boutilier. Following Bob’s untimely death in 2003, JEB’s publisher, The Company of Biologists, asked me to take over as EiC and tasked me with the role of defending the journal’s leading role in comparative physiology. Since then, manuscript submissions have more than doubled (reaching more than 1400 research papers in 2018), the Editorial Board has expanded from 3 to 11 Handling Editors and the journal impact factor has steadily risen from 2 to 3.

Now, nearly 25 years after joining the editorial team, I feel the time has come to hand over the reins to a new EiC and I will be stepping down from my current role in July 2020. One of the many reasons that I have enjoyed my time on JEB so much is that it has allowed me to help to promote an extremely wide range of scientific approaches and scientific tools that are brought to bear on biological problems outside of the realm of biomedically driven interests. This broad variety of scientific curiosity is reflected in the JEB Symposia that have run annually ever since 1978. These symposia highlight current and future topics within JEB’s broad scope and are the source of the free special issue that we publish annually. I also love the fact that The Company of Biologists is a ‘not-for-profit’ organization whose main aim is to support JEB as a ‘community’ journal. In practice, this means that we are able to offer ~45 JEB Travelling Fellowships per year to junior researchers, provide grants for running symposia, conferences and courses, and support the Society for Experimental Biology by providing core funding for their early-career travel grants.

The publishing world and the way that research is reported and disseminated has changed dramatically during my tenure. This is partly as a result of technology; for example, the shift from paper to online submission/publishing and the advent of preprint servers such as bioRxiv. We have further witnessed increased requirements for more transparency about the way research is evaluated, particularly in terms of peer review and editorial decision making. As such, new ways of validating scientific content are being trialled and new metrics for assessing research quality are replacing and/or complementing traditional metrics. The main driver of recent and future change is the open access



(OA) movement. Interestingly, there seems to be, at least currently, little interest in OA in the JEB community, with less than 4% of authors choosing the Gold OA option for publishing their research. This may change, however, with the Plan S initiative, in which an essentially European consortium of research funders plans to mandate OA publishing by all authors they fund. These developments are very likely to have an impact on the way JEB can be published in the future.

It is an exciting time to be involved in publishing, and JEB is in a strong position to move into the next era. With this as a backdrop, The Company of Biologists – led by JEB’s representatives on the Board of Directors - Alan Wilson, Göran Nilsson and Holly Shiels - is seeking a new EiC with a strong vision both for the future evolution of the journal and for its role in the community. As an intrinsic part of this process, they are seeking views on the journal from all members of the experimental biology community (especially those at differing career stages). They are particularly keen to hear feedback on the strengths of JEB, where it can be improved, and what challenges the community and the journal face over the next 10 years, particularly where it might be helpful in directing the search for a new EiC. Equally importantly, they welcome suggestions for future initiatives to maximize the support that the Company/journal provides to the community. If you would like to contribute to the community consultation and help shape the journal’s future, please email Alan Wilson at alan.wilson@biologists.com by 11 September 2019.

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