

How should I revise my paper?

MANY readers will have seen the YouTube parodies based on the movie *Downfall* in which new subtitles are substituted for the original ones to redirect Adolf Hitler's rage to car thieves, computer software, entertainers and many other targets. For authors of scientific papers, the most popular parody of all is probably the attack on the peer review process (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VRBWLpYCPY>). In this, Hitler (or Herr Professor as he is called in the subtitles) receives two favourable reviews on a submitted paper, but the third reviewer feels that the conclusions aren't justified by the data and insists on additional experiments before publication. Hitler bursts into a furious diatribe against ignorant reviewers and the editors who select them. The peer review parody has attracted numerous comments, including many from people who claim to have received insensitive or inappropriate reviews.

In my time I have done as much grumbling about reviews as anyone else, but the point that struck me was how little is said about the role of the editor in the parody itself and in the comments that follow. The editor is blamed for not choosing reviewers wisely, but little else is said about the editor's role. It is as though the editor is little more than a post office, receiving each paper, passing it on to the reviewers and then collating the reviews and returning them to the author with an uncritical acceptance of all opinions expressed in them. The editor does a great deal more.

The editor's work begins when a paper is received. The editor will check its suitability for the journal and either return it as inappropriate or select reviewers. Reviewers are not necessarily chosen in the expectation that they will give a fair, informed and unbiased opinion of the quality of the paper. For example, if a paper makes a contribution to a highly controversial topic, the editor may deliberately send the paper to a reviewer with opposing views to have the manuscript appraised critically by at least one reviewer who is unsympathetic to the position taken. This is done not with the intention of sinking the paper, but of attracting the strongest arguments against it to enable the author to consider and, if possible, defuse them before publication.

When the reviews are returned, the editor will assess them and look again at the paper before making a decision and writing to the author. It

is important at this point to appreciate that reviewers do not accept or reject the paper: the editor does. This aspect is missing from the Hitler peer review parody. In that video, the assumption is that with two favourable reviews and one unfavourable the manuscript has been rejected. This need not be the case and the editor would make this opinion clear when advising the author of the points that must be considered in a revision. Those who have received letters from Harry Recher during his long tenure as editor at *Pacific Conservation Biology* will understand how informative and helpful a good letter from the editor can be. By ignoring the editor's letter, the Hitler parody misses a vital source of direction for authors preparing revisions.

The role of the editor is very much in focus at the moment at *Pacific Conservation Biology*, because Harry has retired after many years of outstanding service as editor. He and his colleagues on the editorial board have established *Pacific Conservation Biology* as a reputable regional journal, publishing material vital in conserving Pacific biota. He leaves very large shoes to fill and the incoming editorial team is well aware of the high standards he has set and that they must strive to maintain.

First and foremost, we would like to reassure readers that the fundamentals of the journal's editorial policy will remain the same. Despite the trend for many Australasian journals to realign themselves as international rather than regional, *Pacific Conservation Biology* will maintain a regional focus and continue to consider for publication papers of explicit relevance to Australasia and the Pacific. *Pacific Conservation Biology* will also retain an emphasis on assisting beginning authors to raise their manuscripts to a level where they can be considered seriously for publication and, where possible, assisting authors whose first language is not English.

This is not to say that there will be no change. Throughout 2010 we will strive to broaden the international representation on the editorial board and therefore to continue the trend for *Pacific Conservation Biology* to attract papers not just from Australia, New Zealand and the USA, but elsewhere around the Pacific. We have also instigated a new policy whereby all manuscripts are double-blind reviewed — that is, authors' names and affiliations are removed from the paper before it is sent to reviewers. By doing so, we hope to avoid any conscious or uncon-

scious bias that may be occasioned by the reputations of authors or their institutions during review. Reviewers will retain the option to either sign their names or to remain anonymous.

It's time, then, to finish half written manuscripts and send them to *Pacific Conservation Biology*. When they come back, just remember to read the letter from the editor before spitting the dummy over the reviewers' reports.

Mike Calver

Meet the new editor-in-chief and managing editors

HARRY Recher stepped down from his second stint as managing editor of *Pacific Conservation Biology* at the end of 2009 to concentrate on his own research. We wish him well and thank him for his outstanding contribution to the journal. He has left boots too large for one pair of feet to fill, so from 2009 *Pacific Conservation Biology* will operate with an editor-in-chief (Mike Calver) and two managing editors (Alan Lymbery and Mike van Keulen). It's an unusual arrangement, but Mike, Alan and Mike are already seasoned collaborators. By working together, they will be able to provide prompt responses on all editorial matters and to cover for each other during periods of leave.

Mike Calver

Mike is best described as a frustrated entomologist. After completing a PhD on grasshopper ecology in 1985, his early jobs as a research scientist (vertebrate pests), a secondary school teacher (a background in vertebrate pests was useful for this) and a Lecturer in Distance Education provided little opportunity for entomological research. He thought things were looking up when he accepted a position in the School of Biological Sciences and Biotechnology at Murdoch University in 1994, but he soon discovered that the prospective research students mostly wanted to work on mammals, although birds were accepted grudgingly as a second choice. He thus became a de facto vertebrate wildlife biologist, with insects only entering the picture as food for "real animals". With the exception of some brief flirtations with plant pathology and bibliometrics, terrestrial vertebrate wildlife remain, by default, his main area of research. He has been a member of the editorial board of *Pacific Conservation Biology* since 1999 and in recent years has taken a particular interest in developing the journal's electronic outlets.

Alan Lymbery

Alan, like Mike, also seems to have had trouble settling down to a steady job. His PhD in ecological genetics was completed in 1984, after which he had two postdoctoral positions in the field of parasitology, working principally on genetic variation in parasites of people and domestic animals. This led to a stint in the Western Australian Department of Agriculture as a Geneticist, developing genetic improvement programmes for livestock species. During this time, Alan developed an interest in wild and cultured fishes. He joined the School of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences at Murdoch University in 1999, where he teaches both parasitology and animal breeding. His research interests remain with fish, mostly with native freshwater species, and include studies on fish biology, population genetics, conservation and parasitic diseases. He has been a member of the editorial board of *Pacific Conservation Biology* since 2008.

Mike van Keulen

Mike is a marine ecologist with a broad range of interests. After completing his PhD on the ecology of water flow in seagrass ecosystems he undertook some post-doc work in seagrass restoration before accepting a lecturing position in Plant Sciences with the School of Biological Sciences and Biotechnology at Murdoch University in 1998. By being in the right place at the right time, on a biological survey at Ningaloo Reef in 2002, Mike was offered a donation for a research station by a local business family. Needless to say he accepted this generous offer and has been involved in coral reef research ever since. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Plant Sciences & Marine Biology at Murdoch University as well as Director of the Coral Bay Research Station, which also operates out of Murdoch. His research interests have expanded somewhat to include a broad range of tropical marine topics, including invertebrate and vertebrate biology and wildlife ecology, as well as his more traditional interests in marine plants. Mike has been on the Editorial Advisory Board of *Pacific Conservation Biology* since 2005.