

Pacific Conservation Biology and Impact Factors

THIS is the last editorial I write as Editor of *Pacific Conservation Biology*. I took over as editor from Craig Moritz in 1997 with Volume III and it is time to let another assume the pleasures, frustrations and responsibilities of guiding *Pacific Conservation Biology* over the next few years. A fresh mind and new ideas can only help *Pacific Conservation Biology* to grow. My time as Editor ends with this issue.

Much has been achieved in the last 10 years. *Pacific Conservation Biology* has grown in stature and moved to regular quarterly publication for the calendar year. We receive a steady stream of good quality papers across the discipline of conservation biology from researchers throughout the Pacific Basin. Yes, most papers continue to come from Australia and New Zealand (see Recher 2002), but there are signs of a geographic shift. There are now regular submissions from the South Pacific islands, Hawaii, New Caledonia, the Galapagos and North America, with a few papers being submitted from China and Southeast Asia. The breadth of our geographic coverage is important in encouraging communication and the exchange of ideas within a huge region of the world. The working relationship developed in the past two years with the Society for Conservation Biology and its Australasian Branch greatly extends *Pacific Conservation Biology's* international exposure. Regular contact among conservation biologists around the Pacific is essential in a region where not only are the conservation issues similar from nation to nation, but effective conservation of many organisms (e.g., migratory birds, marine fish and ecosystems) requires collaboration among biologists as much as between governments.

Although I personally pay little attention (too little according to some) to impact ratings and oppose government policies which purport to judge scientific merit on such measures (see below), I know impact ratings preoccupy many academics, especially those with a career to build, those chasing government money, and not a few with over-inflated egos. For their interest and using the *Scopus* abstracting service, *Pacific Conservation Biology* has an impact factor of ~1.3. This puts us among the top 10 journals in our field as ranked by *Scopus*. Personally I think *Pacific Conservation Biology* has a greater impact, not all of which can be measured using journal citations.

I have been much more interested as Editor as to whether or not *Pacific Conservation Biology* fosters effective communication among conservation biologists, enables research and ideas to be

published which would otherwise be hidden in the grey literature and never be presented to an audience of peers. We achieve this by working with authors on how best to express themselves and present their research. *Pacific Conservation Biology* allows authors to publish ideas and opinions, and to present results that may rely more on experience, observation and a good understanding of the organisms and systems they work with than experimental design, statistical analysis and scientific dogma. We do this while retaining rigorous refereeing. Nonetheless, authors are allowed to decide how they will write their papers, not referees or editors.

After far too many hypercritical referee reports bordering on being little more than anonymous one-upsmanship and point scoring, I began to instruct referees to be constructive. My view is that it is not the referee's responsibility to say how they would have done the research or written the paper, nor even whether a paper should be published. Above all else, referees need to be constructive and have as their primary goal assisting the authors and editor in improving the quality of the manuscript (and the journal). This is not achieved by point scoring and anonymity. Anonymity of referees is not automatic but must be requested (few make this request). Partly this is because the lack of anonymity encourages constructive comment and eliminates personal attacks, but because I believe referees should be available to work with authors if asked. This is especially helpful for beginning authors (many of whom are barely more than students) and who lack experience in publication. After all, it is rare for universities to instruct budding scientists on how to publish, much less ensure they have a solid foundation in English. Unfortunately, it falls on referees and editors to do this; at least at *Pacific Conservation Biology* we see this as one of our responsibilities.

Pacific Conservation Biology is the premier scientific journal devoted to conservation biology in the Pacific. We have achieved this status by being different. I was tempted to write by "daring to be different", but in fact what we do at *Pacific Conservation Biology* is not "daring"; it is what all journals should do, which many used to do, but which almost all now neglect in an era that has seen the communication of science commercialized and degraded. Science has surrendered control of its journals to big business and government bureaucrats. The fawning obedience of Australian science and universities to the short-sighted, flawed and intellectually bankrupt policies on science communication of Canberra bureaucrats

and their political masters is equal only to their capitulation to the thugs and terrorists of the animal rights and welfare Mafia (see Fulton and Ford 2001; Recher 2001; Tideman and Vardon 2002; see Dyson and Calver 2003 for a different perspective).

When journals ask authors to cite papers published in the same journal to maximize impact ratings, there is something wrong. *Pacific Conservation Biology* has never done this, and hopefully never will. I have drawn authors' attention to papers published in *Pacific Conservation Biology*, but only rarely and only when there was scientific reason for doing so. Much more often, we have asked authors to consider a paper or papers published in other journals, especially those published in other countries (see Majer and Recher 1994). We specifically ask referees to draw the attention of authors to relevant papers in overseas journals and papers published before the 1990s that are relevant to work being considered in the manuscript. Papers should not be cited simply to increase ratings (of either the journal or the author). Papers are cited for three primary reasons: to acknowledge the work and ideas of others, to verify or support the research and conclusions being presented, and to assist readers in accessing the literature. Helping authors, publishing results and ideas that would otherwise be lost, and encouraging good, clear communication has an impact greater than any citation index can measure.

Under a new Editor, *Pacific Conservation Biology* will continue to flourish. We are fortunate in having a committed publisher in Surrey Beatty & Sons and a good partner in the Society for Conservation Biology. We do need more conservation biologists willing to commit

themselves to editorial support and as referees. At this writing, we also need someone to take over from me as co-ordinating Editor. The person who was going to take on this role has had to withdraw due to an unexpected and immediate increase in teaching responsibilities, so the need is urgent.

Being an Editor of *Pacific Conservation Biology* is not a thankless job. It has rewards, many of them, but it does require commitment and a strong interest in helping others. While there is a lot of work in being Editor, there is also abundant opportunity for creativity and for contributing in a meaningful way to the conservation of the vast biological and human resources of the Pacific. If you are interested, we would like to hear from you. Until then, thanks to everyone, secretaries, referees, associate editors, authors, readers and the publisher, for all the support and help you have given me over the last 10 years. I have enjoyed it, but it is time to go.

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Harry F. Recher

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