

Editorial

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This first issue of the new look *Emu* coincides with the end of my first year as editor and I respond to pressure from colleagues on Council to explain the reasoning behind the face-lift and my hopes for the future of our journal.

I cannot claim any credit for the new design of *Emu*; this was a *fait accompli* when I took on the job of editor and was the work of Nick Flower of Deakin University ably assisted by our production editor, Andrew Pecze; RAOU owes them a large debt of gratitude. The aims of the changes, with all of which I thoroughly agree and welcome, are as follows:

The cover with its brief, bold name and table of contents below means that the journal can hardly be missed when it stands on a library accession rack and the contents can be quickly scanned without handling. Inside, we have tried to achieve a good balance of type on the page, to clearly identify subheadings, to avoid wasting space between paragraphs and to ensure that the captions for tables and figures remain clear to read but are sufficiently different from the text that confusion is avoided. We gain little, if any increased space from these changes, but it is generally conceded that the new lay-out is more pleasant and easier to read. I hope that you, the reader, will agree.

The detail of presentation is the subject of revised instructions to authors that appear for the first time inside the back cover of this issue. In preparing these instructions, I have borne in mind that many people prepare their own manuscripts on a word processor and that, probably, they are little more expert than I am. Simplicity has therefore been the aim, and is exemplified by the new style of references wherein only species names will be italicised and where no attempt is made to abbreviate the titles of journals.

So much for the new journal. My ideas for the future do not involve radical changes; my main aim will be to provide an *Emu* that is readable and interesting to the majority of subscribers. To this end I regard myself as an 'average' reader. If, after expert colleagues have refereed a paper, I still cannot understand the opaque statistics or specialised technical jargon, that paper will not be accepted until the basic ideas are expressed so as to be intelligible to scientist and lay-reader alike. I do not intend to rewrite every manuscript submitted — life is too short. Nor do I expect all papers to fit precisely into the standard format of Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion; these categories are meant to provide helpful guidelines and not a rigid strait-jacket. The end result must remain a clearly presented, readable story.

Some of my professional colleagues tend to denigrate papers that report the details of a species' life history, and to feel that an international journal, such as *Emu* purports to be, should concentrate more on theoretical aspects of our science. I cannot agree; without the basic data, theorising is worthless and on a continent as vast as Australia, we still have many species for which little is known about their basic ecology. It is becoming increasingly evident that in several aspects Australian species differ from their well-studied Northern Hemisphere counterparts; two examples of this will suffice. First, the frequency with which Australian species indulge in co-operative breeding (Ford *et al.* 1988), and second, the large number of Australian species that may rear several broods during a long breeding season, rather than one 'big bang' effort as is common in the northern hemisphere (Rowley & Russell 1991).

I will welcome papers describing the way in which our birds have evolved to cope with our Australian environment, provided these papers are supported by adequate data gathered over a range of seasons, and preferably, from individually marked birds. Such material is of particular importance with the production of future volumes of the *Handbook* looming large in all our minds.

Unfortunately, I must end on a sadder, less constructive, note. It seems that *Emu* is limited to four issues each of 64 pages, giving us a total of 256 pages each year, at a cost of about AS\$40,000 including postage. I could easily fill another 64 pages from the current avalanche of submissions; unfortunately Council cannot see its way to spending another \$10,000 and so, if delays are not to exceed the current one year from date of acceptance, I shall have to increase our rejection rate. I cannot tout for people to contribute to the costs of publication but I, and other *Emu* readers in general, are very grateful to those people and organisations that are sufficiently far-sighted to recognise that the ultimate costs of publication are a very legitimate charge against research funding.

References

- Ford, H.A., Bell, H., Nias, R. & Noske, R. 1988. The relationship between ecology and the incidence of co-operative breeding in Australian birds. *Behavioural Ecology & Sociobiology* 22, 239-249.
- Rowley, I. & Russell, E. 1991. Demography of passerines in the temperate southern hemisphere. Pp. 22-44 in *Population Studies — their Relevance to Conservation and Management*. Eds C.M. Perrins, J.D. Lebreton & G.M. Hirons. Oxford University Press, Oxford.