

Journal Matters

Animal Behaviour Editorial Office

The European editorial office of *Animal Behaviour* is located at the University of Nottingham, UK. All communications relating to manuscripts and editorial matters should be directed to the Managing Editor: *Dr Angela Turner, School of Biological Sciences, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK; tel/fax: +44-(0)115-9513249; email: aktuner@pln1.life.nottingham.ac.uk.*

A Free Lunch? Should you Post Publishable Articles on the WWW?

Many of you will have received emails and read articles over the past months suggesting that rather than (or in addition to) submitting your papers to traditional journals, you should archive them on a web site, thus making them, as Stevan Harnad of the Cognitive Sciences archive 'CogPrints' has put it, 'available to all of us everywhere at no cost to anyone'. Articles have appeared in prestigious journals (*Science, Nature, American Scientist*, etc) proposing various ingenious ways to finance electronic journals that might allow everyone to have access to everything for nothing.

It is certain that some time soon there will be far less shipping of hard copies of scientific journals around the world. Indeed, electronic subscriptions to many journals (*Animal Behaviour* among them) are already available on the web, and the number of such electronic journals is likely to increase. There is, however, a big difference between articles freely available on open web sites and electronic publication of journals available only by subscription, as *Animal Behaviour* is currently. If you believe, as we do, that dissemination of peer-reviewed, copy-edited articles, whether paper or electronic, is the safeguard of scientific quality, then you need to think twice before posting your publishable (i.e. quality) work on free web sites.

The safeguard does not come free. Peer reviewing is a costly process. Consider the handling of a typical paper submitted to *Animal Behaviour*. A manuscript arrives in the editorial office and an acknowledgement of receipt (1) is sent to the author by the Managing Editor. The Managing Editor (2) selects and (3) contacts reviewers to determine whether they are willing to review the article in question. The article is then (4) sent to two reviewers who have expressed a willingness to review it. If the reviewers are late in returning their reviews, they must be (5) contacted by the

Managing Editor and (6) occasionally replaced. The reviews must be collated (7), and copies sent (8) to the selected editor and reviewers by the Managing Editor. A decision letter (9) must then be prepared by the editor, copied to the Managing Editor and (10) sent to the author, and, assuming the manuscript requires revision, it must be (11) returned to the author, sometimes after further refereeing (12). The amended version must (13) then be sent to the editor handling the manuscript. A new decision letter must be sent (14) and, the manuscript, if accepted, must then be sent to a copy-editor (15) who suggests revisions to the author (16) and finally acknowledges receipt of the final draft (17) which now must be sent to the publisher (18) who sets type, then sends the galleys to the author (19).

Nineteen communications (more in the North American Office) to process a single manuscript, and the process often becomes considerably more complex. Often, there is correspondence with authors on various points; several potential referees may have to be contacted before two are found who will agree to do a review; some manuscripts have to go to the ASAB Ethical Committee for additional review; authors appeal various decisions to the Executive Editor and Editorial Board, etc, etc. Take the above procedure (or any similar one), multiply it by the roughly 700 manuscripts submitted to *Animal Behaviour* each year, and you can see that there are unavoidable costs in manpower, postage and information technology simply to manage the paper flow.

Because of these costs, until there are in place procedures other than those currently available to finance peer review and copy editing, posting quality articles on a web site for free distribution threatens the survival of peer-reviewed, copy-edited journals. New sources of funding must be arranged before, not after, old sources are abandoned.

We have no axe to grind as Executive Editors of a journal. Our terms will have ended before articles posted on free web sites will have had a major impact on the traditional system for funding scientific publication. We do, however, believe that peer review and copy editing are of significant value to the academic community.

There is not yet any agreed-upon method to pay for peer review and copy editing of articles posted on 'free' web sites. Until there is, posting articles there either before (in which case, even if posted only in part or in summary, they may be invalidated as original articles for other publication purposes) or after publication in a traditional journal (paper or electronic), is an attack on the peer review and editing process and, consequently, on the best interests of the academic community. Please don't do it. There is no free lunch.

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