

Yet even if the journalist is responsible for all the writing, a scientist cannot expect him or her to produce a book alone. “It doesn’t happen by magic,” says Catherine Dold, a freelance science and health writer in Boulder, Colorado. In addition to interviewing the scientist for concepts and anecdotes, the writer will need frequent feedback on chapters. Blakeslee recommends that the co-authors meet in person regularly to work on the book, maintain rapport and ensure clear communication. If the scientist weighs in only at the end, the writer may focus on points that the scientist would not have chosen to highlight, or might neglect areas that the scientist considers important.

It is also crucial to stick to the schedule because book-publishing schedules tend to be less flexible than those many scientists are used to. If one partner falls behind, the other team member or members may have trouble adjusting their schedule. And the publisher may cancel the book if the manuscript is late. Spiegelhalter found that having a co-author made him less likely to procrastinate.

“You’ve just got to get on with it,” he says. “Teamwork is very effective at driving it along.”

Researchers should expect disagreements to arise, especially over wording or the appropriate level of technical detail. They must ensure that the text is accurate, but should also recognize the writer’s expertise in communicating to a lay audience. Writing engaging chapters that would maintain a reader’s attention “required shattering a lot of the conventions that I’m comfortable with”, says Emlen. Zimmer used more active verbs and shorter sentences than Emlen was used to, for example.

But if the scientist begins to feel that the relationship is foundering, it is better to terminate sooner than later, says Morel. The collaboration agreement should contain a termination clause that specifies what will happen if the partnership dissolves. The scientist might keep the copyright to the text, for example, while the writer keeps any payment received so far.

Well-matched co-authors can avoid such pitfalls. Emlen says that it was “a dream” to work with Zimmer on the evolution textbook: Emlen provided deep background knowledge of the field, and Zimmer conveyed the material with compelling stories and clean, accessible language. “I spent a lot of the past few years realizing just how hard it is to write like that,” says Emlen. At the end of the day, whatever the bumps along the way, both parties want the same thing: to write a great book. “You’re in this together,” says Blakeslee. ■

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TURNING POINT

Danielle Edwards



Evolutionary biologist Danielle Edwards faced a difficult choice last autumn. She could either accept a prestigious 3-year Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) from the Australian Research Council and return to her home country or she could continue her efforts to secure tenure-track positions for herself and her husband at the University of California (UC) Merced. She chose the latter.

You grew up in Australia. Is it still the site of your fieldwork?

Yes, I maintain some research on Australian reptiles. I grew up north of Sydney with a national forest as my back yard. After exploring the reproductive biology of amphibians as an undergraduate at the University of Newcastle, Australia, I did a PhD at the University of Western Australia in Perth studying how environmental processes drive patterns of speciation in this biodiversity hotspot. I then spent more than five years in the United States studying Galapagos tortoises, but still do work on Australian reptiles and continue to expand my collaborations around the world.

Why did you move to the United States?

I never thought I would leave Australia. In 2009, I finished a postdoc at the Australian National University in Canberra. When that funding ran out, I tried for other grants in Australia, but was unsuccessful, so I took an offer for a postdoc at the University of Michigan. My now-husband eventually joined me a year later, and by 2011, we had both secured postdocs at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

Did you look for permanent jobs in Australia?

Yes, since 2010. I applied for pretty much every Australian job I could — but, given the dismal state of funding in Australia, I was applying for US positions too. I’ve been interviewed several times for US jobs, and made it onto many

short lists — but could not do the same in Australia, where the odds are even worse than in the United States. In early 2013, I was ready to give up on academia. I was in my mid-30s, and wanted to have a child and settle down. When I applied for the DECRA, I had lots of US applications out. I was interviewed last May at UC Merced, and got the job offer a few days later. Last October, I found out I got the DECRA.

How did you respond?

When the DECRA came through, I was in a state of shock — I never thought I would get it. It was a huge thing for my family when I moved to the United States, especially once we learned that I am expecting our first child in April. Finding out about the award was an emotional time. On the one hand, we had an opportunity to go back to Australia where I would be able to raise my child near my extended family. On the other hand, UC Merced was in the process of interviewing my husband for a tenure-track faculty position, which he will begin this summer. However, we felt that there was no opportunity for long-term employment for us in Australia — particularly for both of us in the same place. Australian universities are struggling under funding cuts and only one has a spousal-hire policy. I never really felt that I had the option to take the DECRA.

Your declining the DECRA made headlines. What was that like?

Honestly, it’s a bit weird. There was a misperception that I had turned down the DECRA in protest, but it was much more complex than that. There were ten DECRA offers in evolutionary biology last year, but there were only three permanent academic positions in the field. If this grant is designed to keep or bring bright minds to Australia, there are no follow-on funding opportunities. Several people wrote to thank me for raising awareness about Australia’s funding situation.

Do you hope to make it back to Australia?

I wouldn’t rule it out, but I’m deeply committed to my new institution. We’ve landed in a pretty idyllic place. We’ll be able to afford to buy property and raise our child the way we grew up — something we wouldn’t be able to do in Australia. Plus, UC Merced is assembling a great group of people with a spectacular gender balance. I feel very positive about my decision and happy that I now have a direction. ■

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN

MARK SISTRUM