

When we were very young...

Now we are volume six — a perfect opportunity to reflect on some of the highlights, personal and professional, of the past five years.

This issue marks the fifth anniversary of the first issue of *Nature Plants*, launched on 8 January 2015. I hope you will therefore forgive us if we indulge in some personal reflections on the first years of the journal and what the ride has been like.

“The most interesting aspect of becoming an editor”, according to Guillaume Tena, “has been the gradual evolution from a hyper-specialized researcher to having a broader view of an entire field, from concepts to methodologies. We must be able to handle manuscripts from subfields we never worked on before and yet apply a common quality analysis grid independent of the content of each manuscript. It is also a realization of the immense responsibility in our hands. Many people have told me that one first-author article published in our journal can change a junior scientist’s career. Even if we take several decisions a day, it is important to remember that and never let it become a meaningless routine.”

It is definitely this interaction with our authors and reviewers that has created the journal, and no one is more involved with that interface than our Editorial Assistant, Anastasia Broadbridge. For Ana, “one of the most gratifying parts of my role is following the journey of a paper from initial submission to acceptance and seeing the method behind why we publish only the best research in plant science. I want to thank everyone I have worked with so far — authors, reviewers and readers — for their continued support. The cycle of our publishing process is only able to thrive as a result of your collaboration.”

That collaboration also involves the editors getting out of the office to meet our constituency, which has brought surprises to one of our newer recruits, Ryan Scarrow. “International travel was still new to me when I started in 2017, but being a *Nature Plants* Editor requires going to conferences the world over. I was recovering from food poisoning in Cape Town while attending, ironically, a food security congress, but I wasn’t going to let it stop me from getting a guided tour of Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. Standing next to some of the last remaining individual cycads on Earth was both thrilling and heart-breaking,

yet the researchers showed me how they plan to keep these ancient miracles going (and protected from thieves!). The highlight, though, was walking along the Boomslang tree canopy and emerging from the trees to a glorious view over the gardens towards Table Mountain in African sunshine, further away from my home in Kansas than I had ever been.”

For New York-based editor Lei Lei, the interactions with our editorial colleagues from other journals has been a highlight. “One of my favourite experiences in the past three years has been joining our internal Plants Editorial Community, a place where editors with shared interests in plant science discuss topics of importance and develop strong professional relationships. We have been involved in various projects, including organizing collections, hosting guest seminars, and arranging round-table meetings and *Nature* conferences. The Plants Community is a reliable intelligence group building robust interactions among editors and communicating the fascination of plant science more widely.”

Of course, the most tangible thing about the first five years of *Nature Plants* is what we have published. Lauren Heslop, as Art Editor, is responsible for making sure that our content is not just important and interesting, but also beautiful. For her, “working on *Nature Plants* is great fun. I get to draw intricate figures, work with some amazing imagery and our monthly production meetings are always my favourite (don’t tell the other journals!). It’s always a pleasure to see my illustrations and design work published for an author’s paper. A few of my favourite covers have been the ivy DNA helix for the April 2017 issue, the hands holding coffee beans of the July 2017 issue, the citrus fruits in November 2018’s issue and the soothing blue tones of May 2019.” All of which are to be seen on this issue’s cover, designed, of course, by Lauren.

Jun Lyu, our editor in Shanghai, has clear recollections of the papers he has handled. “I still remember the afternoon in 2014 when I got so thrilled reading the paper about the orchid P code (*Nat. Plants* 1, 15046; 2015). It was such a beautiful discovery! Also, handling closely related papers can create

amusing situations. In 2015, we published three papers reporting the same molecular module that regulates rice grain size and yield (see *Nat. Plants* 2, 15210; 2015). I solicited two of the papers during a lab visit to the institute of two of the groups, yet they were totally unaware of each other’s work. Occasionally, editors get unconscious premonitions that certain types of studies will be submitted. I felt exactly that when we received Zachary Lippman’s work on domesticating an orphan crop using genome editing (*Nat. Plants* 4, 766–770; 2018). I’d thought before about this possibility, so seeing the reality really made me excited.”

All of *Nature Plants*’ content passes through the hands of our Copy Editor, Lucy Everitt, giving her a particular overview of the journal. “I see definite shifts in the language used by the scientific community to express and understand the rich cornucopia of plant biology and its global impacts. With the #FridaysforFuture movement driving climate change into the heart of the political radar, it’s no wonder that this has been reflected in the vision and output of *Nature Plants*. The number of articles we published mentioning ‘climate change’ in 2019 was up 56% from the previous year, and our October Editorial (*Nat. Plants* 5, 1025; 2019) critically analysed such events through a biopolitical lens; for example, discussing the forest fires that ravaged the Brazilian Amazon. We also published a Review bridging the gap between molecular CRISPR techniques and current agricultural, environmental and ecological challenges (*Nat. Plants* 5, 778–794; 2019), showing that developing crops with more resilience to the effects of climate change should go hand in hand with global political reform.”

The last five years have been very exciting, trying to create a journal that truly reflects the full breadth of plant research and its effect on our society. There have been a lot of highlights, but *Nature Plants* remains a work-in-progress. Expect to see even more to interest, astound and inspire in the next five years. □

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