

Our first year by the numbers

Nature Ecology & Evolution is a year old, and we are grateful for the enthusiastic reception from our research community. To celebrate our birthday we have compiled some facts and figures.

This month's marvellous cover image from Rosemary Mosco celebrates a few of the species that have graced our pages over the past 12 months. These species represent just a small proportion of the 200 or so studies that we have published in 2017. The big question lots of people want answered is whether we've published more ecology or more evolution, and you'll have to read to the end to get the answer to that one. In the meantime, let's start with a few facts about the topics that have featured in the 227 peer-reviewed publications (Articles, Brief Communications, Analyses, Reviews and Perspectives) from our first 12 issues.

First up, a bit of very broad taxonomy: 99 papers have been primarily about non-human animals, compared with 33 about plants, 37 about microbes or fungi and 17 about humans (these figures don't sum to 227 because some papers can't be categorized as primarily about any particular group). Similarly, 125 studies have focused on terrestrial species or ecosystems, compared with 43 aquatic studies.

It's very difficult to assign a single topic to many manuscripts, but there are a few broad definitions that might be of interest. Studies about anthropogenic environmental change or conservation biology came in at 51; those that make use of palaeontological or archaeological data numbered 27; and evolutionary developmental biology accounted for 17 manuscripts. These are just some examples, with many of our published studies spanning multiple fields such as behavioural ecology, molecular evolution and biogeography, to name but a few.

Alongside these thematic categorizations, we also wanted to have a serious look at the diversity of scientists who interact with the journal. The data below should be considered judiciously, as several caveats apply. We don't record the gender identity of authors or reviewers, so name recognition by the editor was required, and in several cases gender had to be left unassigned. In addition, the data sets do not correspond exactly to each other — authors of published manuscripts are taken from our first 12 issues, whereas those of submitted manuscripts come from the first 12 months that we received submissions, which is April 2016–April 2017. However, we feel

that the data are indicative enough to reveal some probable trends.

First, we looked at gender. For the submitted primary research manuscripts for which we could assign a gender with reasonable confidence, 217 out of 891 (24%) had women as corresponding authors. Of the 383 equivalent manuscripts that we sent for peer review, 103 (27%) had female corresponding authors, and the same percentage applied to the manuscripts we actually published (52 out of 195). We suspect these figures are reasonably representative of the intractably unequal proportion of women in permanent research positions. One concerning figure is that for the 46 manuscripts we published in which the first author was not the corresponding author (and for which gender could be assigned), only 8 (17%) had female first authors. Assuming this cohort represents more junior researchers, it gives little cause for optimism about the rate of change of the gender ratio in senior research positions.

As well as making sure we don't have a gender bias in the likelihood of a manuscript being reviewed or published, journals have the opportunity to make a positive

contribution to redressing gender imbalance in research. One such way is through the choice of peer reviewers. On this, our ratio is very much the same as above — 262 out of 1,008 (26%) reviewers of research manuscripts were women. We are striving to increase this proportion by expanding our pool of reviewers of both genders, so as not to disproportionately burden any individual. Another way of championing the contributions of women is through commissioned content. The ratio of female corresponding authors for non-research articles is 36% (47 out of 130), which in part reflects active choices by our editors when commissioning.

Diversity is not, of course, all about gender. Of the many other axes of diversity, geographic location of authors is one that we can investigate with reasonable ease. The proportions in Fig. 1 tell an interesting and in some ways uncomfortable tale. Although it is no great surprise that the majority of our submissions come from Europe and North America, the statistics reveal that we have been slightly more likely to send manuscripts from these locations to peer review. In contrast, manuscripts from

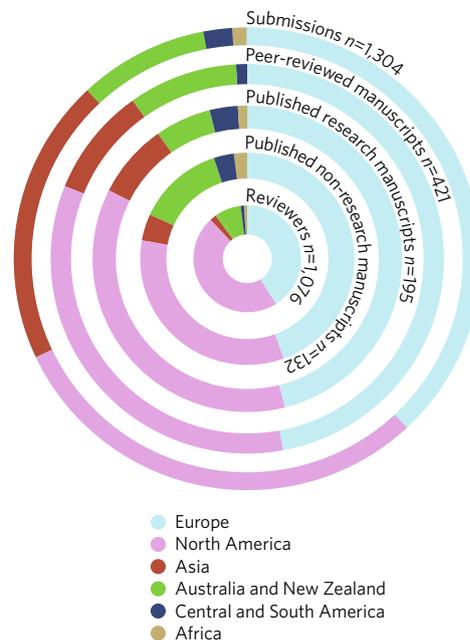


Fig. 1 | Geographical distribution of corresponding authors and reviewers.

Asia represent 20% of our submissions, but less than half that proportion of our peer reviewed or published manuscripts. The numbers also show that Europe and North America are overrepresented as our source of peer reviewers and authors of non-research content, and that we recruit peer reviewers and commissioned authors from Asia at even lower rates than our ratio of published research authors from that region. This implies poor engagement of the journal with Asian researchers, despite our recent [Editorial](#) highlighting the impressive research output of the region.

We are confident that the geographic bias in the proportion of manuscripts sent to review is explained by the quality of the manuscripts in question, but to bolster this confidence, in 2018 our editorial team will take steps to identify and tackle any unconscious biases they may have. We are more able to influence the geographical

balance of our reviewer and commissioned-author pools, and we are investigating ways of reaching out to a more geographically diverse range of voices. One method is through lab visits and conferences — members of our editorial team met with researchers in China and Ethiopia in 2017, and we are looking forward to meeting researchers in Japan, China and elsewhere in 2018.

The charts in [Fig. 1](#) are just summaries of the data, and more details can be found on our [community site](#). Full transparency is not possible because of the confidentiality of authors and reviewers, but we have attempted to provide as much information as we can. Readers may, for example, like to look at breakdowns by country rather than just by continent, and we have these data available for some of the categories.

These issues are a snapshot of the ongoing efforts of our editorial team to

fairly showcase the very best research from across the fields of ecology and evolution. We are thrilled by the content that we have published in our first year — a success that would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of so many authors and reviewers — thank you!

And finally, the answer to the all-important ecology or evolution question. When forced to assign every peer-reviewed published article to either ecology or evolution (and bearing in mind that it is really a false dichotomy — many of them could be classed as both), the editor found that evolution just came in as the winner, with 121 to ecology's 106. We are looking forward to seeing what happens in 2018. □

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