

# Matters Arising

A revised format emphasizes our desire to encourage discussion of published papers.

This issue of *Nature Ecology & Evolution* includes our first use of a new format, Matters Arising. This format reflects mostly a change of name rather than content type, and the reason for introducing it is fairly mundane: an attempt to standardize approaches across the Nature journals. However, it does offer an opportunity to remind readers of our enthusiasm for post-publication discussion.

Until now, our Correspondence section has included both technical comments on papers published in *Nature Ecology & Evolution* and non-technical comments on papers published in any journal or on matters of general interest. This practice is in contrast to that of *Nature*, in which the Correspondence section is reserved for short non-technical matters of general interest, and, until 2018 (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07150-1>), technical comments on published *Nature* papers were classed as Brief Communications Arising. From now on, all Nature journals will use the Matters Arising format for peer-reviewed technical comments, and those journals that use the Correspondence format will reserve it for informal commentary on any topic.

Since our launch at the beginning of 2017, we have published 71 items of Correspondence—one of the highest numbers for Nature journals. This rate reflects both the high value that we attach to such discussion and the enthusiasm

of the ecology and evolution research community for engaging in dialogue. Forty of these Correspondences were in response to content previously published in the journal, although this number includes both technical and non-technical comments on both primary research and other types of content. From now on, the Matters Arising format will indicate peer-reviewed technical responses to primary research and, in most cases, will be co-published with a reply from the original authors. At the same time, our Correspondence section will continue to provide a forum for non-technical discussion. We envisage that most of these Correspondence pieces will address matters of community interest rather than responding to published content, especially primary research content, for which formal peer-reviewed discussion is usually more appropriate. However, we have published non-technical Correspondence pieces in response to opinion or Review content, and we will continue to use this format for such purposes.

Despite these format changes, our philosophy regarding post-publication discussion remains the same. We believe that informed discussion benefits both authors and the wider scientific community, and that when this discussion is technical, it should be peer-reviewed (although we are glad for it to appear on preprint servers while peer review is ongoing). We believe that such considered and

long-format discussion complements the more immediate discussion that may occur on social media or other similar platforms, such as the Nature Research Ecology & Evolution community (<https://natureecoevocommunity.nature.com/>). We are particularly keen to move away from an ethos in which the publication of formal comments is considered to indicate a problem with the original study. Although some Matters Arising may indicate strong differences of opinion regarding the importance of the published work, many will offer extensions and even suggest hidden strengths. In cases in which the scientific record needs to be amended, we will continue to use Corrections and Retractions.

We will still maintain a high threshold of interest and relevance for considering Matters Arising, but by publishing them on a fairly regular basis, we hope to normalize this type of productive discussion. By removing the stigma once associated with having such a comment attached to a paper, we also hope to make the process more collegial than has sometimes been the case.

For further information about Matters Arising, please see our guidelines (<https://www.nature.com/natecolevol/info/matters-arising>). □

Published online: 26 June 2019  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-019-0943-x>