



Reflections on a quarter century of editorial service

Daniel Simberloff

Received: 30 August 2024 / Accepted: 31 August 2024
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After 15 years as Editor-in-Chief of *Biological Invasions* plus another three as Co-Editor-in-Chief with Laura Meyerson, and service on the editorial board since the journal began in 1999 under founding Editor-in-Chief Jim Carlton, I offer some brief reflections on my perceptions of its trajectory. Of course it has grown dramatically, just as the discipline has. Volume 1 had four issues and 31 articles; volume 10 in 2008, my first year as Editor-in-Chief, had eight issues and 131 articles (not counting book reviews). Last year (2023, volume 25), there were 12 issues and 255 articles. From the beginning of the journal through today, we recognized that, given the global nature of invasion science, it is crucial to engage a geographically diverse authorship. We also recognized that this meant that the initial disproportionate share of articles from North American and, to a lesser extent, European authors should be redressed. To a degree, that has happened. Volume 1 had first authors from four nations, whereas first authors in volume 10 represented 27 nations, and those in 2023 hailed from 44 nations. However, much work remains to be done in this regard. In volume 1, 90% of first authors were from North America and 6% from Europe. In volume 10, the analogous figures are 53% from North America and 24% from Europe; last year 38% were from

North America and 25% from Europe. Nuñez et al. (2022), although depicting an increasing number of nations represented in published papers (as indicated by corresponding author affiliation) and a decreasing proportion of papers from the United States, nevertheless lamented a continuing imbalance. They suggested one reason for the latter was a corresponding editorial board imbalance.

Kuebbing et al. (2022), examining the editorial board composition of *Biological Invasions*, found that the board had become more diverse in various ways but argued that further diversification would aid coverage of the subject and more accurately reflect its global nature. Some advance in this regard is evident. The initial editorial board consisted of 20 members from 10 nations, of whom nine (45%) were North American. By the time I became Editor-in-Chief, the 29 members were from 15 nations, of whom 14 (48%) were from North America. By 2023, the number had risen to 139 editors from 25 nations, of whom 72 (52%) were from North America. To the extent that board members actually solicit submissions—or their very presence on the board encourages certain submissions, or their backgrounds lead them to assess manuscripts somewhat differently—clearly still more remains to be done with respect to board geographic representation. It is a further sign of progress that the journal has two new Editors-in-Chief—Evangelina Schwindt and Mariano Rodriguez-Cabal—who are respected invasion scientists and who greatly broaden the geographic scope of the journal leadership.

D. Simberloff (✉)
Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology,
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996, USA
e-mail: dsimberloff@utk.edu

As Nuñez et al. (2022) emphasized, the fact that English has become the universal language of science presents obstacles for non-anglophone scientists, even if one grants that it has facilitated research in certain ways (cf. Mooney 1998). It is not the only reason for the geographic imbalance in editors and authors, but it is a big factor. Dealing with this aspect of the problem is a large systemic matter for science, and *Biological Invasions* and even Springer Nature cannot solve it by themselves. What could be done, at cost, would be for the journal to offer quick and accurate language assistance and copy-editing including assistance in translation by highly qualified persons. Volunteer efforts could be organized and can help, but I do not believe they can suffice, no matter how heartfelt and magnanimous.

A dark cloud on the horizon is the increasing failure of the peer-review process, at least as it currently operates on a volunteer basis for both editorial board members and reviewers. This failure threatens the future success of *Biological Invasions* and all other academic journals (see, e.g., Flaherty 2022). Every editor recognizes the increasing difficulty of convincing qualified experts to review manuscripts. That was not nearly so great an issue when I first became Editor-in-Chief 16 years ago, but it has quickly become an almost insurmountable problem. I lack quantitative data, but my personal record for recruiting reviewers for one manuscript is 11, about 4 years ago, and I know of one current manuscript for which 18 qualified scientists have declined the invitation to review. A large literature deplors this shift and cites various forces as causal. Producing a detailed, thoughtful review is a challenging task, but we do this as an absolutely necessary service to the science and the scientific community. There have obviously always been free-riders who don't perform the service, or don't bother to perform it well, but who reap its benefits by publishing their research. When, say, 8% of all community members were free-riders, the system could sustain the burden they impose. When, say, 50% fall in this category, the system cannot be sustained. Somehow we must do better at inculcating this ethic in students.

On the plus side, *Biological Invasions* still adheres to the broad vision articulated by founding Editor-in-Chief Jim Carlton (1999), who welcomed contributions on impacts, patterns, processes, management,

and policy on invasions by non-native species. Over my years as editor, I learned an enormous amount from manuscripts submitted on all of these topics. It has been particularly gratifying to me that *Biological Invasions* continues to lead in publishing detailed research on impacts of particular invasions; this research in sum has contributed enormously to one of the great accomplishments of this new science: a much deeper understanding of the staggering variation in invasion consequences. I also enthusiastically welcomed the increasing number and variety of research papers on management approaches; in the early days of invasion biology, management methods were largely the domain of separate journals and the gray literature, to the detriment of academic scientists, managers, and policymakers. The breadth of featured invasion-related topics augurs well for continuing growth and success of both invasion science and *Biological Invasions*.

Funding The author discloses no funding.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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