

Letter from the SMBE President

In June 1982, a symposium on "Evolution of Genes and Proteins" was held at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, in conjunction with the joint meeting of the Society for the Study of Evolution and the American Society of Naturalists. On this occasion a group of molecular evolutionists decided to start a new journal called *Molecular Biology and Evolution (MBE)* with Walter Fitch as editor in chief and with myself as managing editor. The purpose of starting this journal was to (1) have better communication between the molecular biologists and the evolutionists, (2) rapidly publish high-quality papers, (3) have a journal owned and controlled by the scientific community, and (4) make the journal available to an international readership at an affordable price.

After this decision was made, Walter and I spent many months to find an appropriate publisher and establish various procedures to run the journal. We were fortunate in receiving many high-quality papers from the beginning and published the first issue of *MBE* in December 1983, and we completed volume 1 by November of 1984, as scheduled. I am pleased to mention that *MBE* received an award (Honorable Mention) for excellence in publishing for 1984 from the Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division, Association of American Publishers. *MBE* quickly established itself as a respectable journal among the scientific community, and according to the ISI it is the most cited journal in the area of evolutionary studies. The number of pages per volume also increased from 507 in volume 1 to 1410 in volume 10.

This achievement was of course accomplished by the enthusiastic support of the editorial board members, article contributors, and general readers of the journal. I want to thank all of them for their support. I also wish

to mention that the success of the journal is to a large measure due to Walter Fitch's heroic effort to maintain the high quality of the journal. As the editor in chief, he read every paper that was published in *MBE* and made sure that all papers were understandable to the general readership. He devoted nearly 50% of his time to *MBE* during the past 10 years. I have never heard of any other editor who had such a devotion to a journal that he or she was editing. Walter was also pivotal in activating the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution (SMBE) in 1992. As the first President of the Society, he again took an initiative and spent many hours running the Society. Thanks to his strong leadership, SMBE is emerging as a major international society of evolutionary studies.

We are now entering into a new era after Walter stepped down from the Editorship and the Presidency. Barry Hall, the new editor of *MBE*, has abundant energy and has determined to speed up the publication of papers. I therefore urge all molecular evolutionists to submit their best papers to *MBE*. The Council of SMBE is also making efforts to facilitate communication between the molecular biologists and the evolutionists at the international level. The 1994 annual meeting will be held on June 15–19 at the University of Georgia, Athens, as a joint meeting with the Society for the Study of Evolution, the American Society of Naturalists, and the Society of Systematic Biology. Details of the program will be published in the March issue. The 1995 meeting will probably be held in Japan, though a final decision has not been made. I urge you to participate in all the activities of SMBE and am looking forward to another decade of growth of *MBE* and SMBE.

MASATOSHI NEI

Letter from the Editor of *Molecular Biology and Evolution*

This is the first issue of the first volume of *Molecular Biology and Evolution (MBE)* that has been edited by someone other than Walter Fitch.

In his message to the membership of the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution, President Masatoshi Nei presented some of the history of the Journal and the Society. In that message Masatoshi understated his role in the creation of this journal, and I wish to remedy that understatement. Masatoshi Nei conceived of the need to have a new journal in the field of molecular evolution, and he took the opportunity of the symposium on "Evolution of Genes and Proteins" to call together the leading figures in the field to discuss that possibility. At that informal dinner meeting Masatoshi

drafted Walter Fitch to serve as the editor in chief of the proposed journal. I have no idea how Masatoshi managed to persuade Walter to serve, but the wisdom of that choice is clear.

Together Walter Fitch and Masatoshi Nei created what has become the leading journal in the field of evolution (table 1). The effort that each of them put into this enterprise has been enormous. Of the 455 papers published in the first decade of *MBE*, Walter Fitch handled 186 as Corresponding Editor, and Masatoshi Nei handled 116. Over the years 15 individuals have served as Associate Editors, and together they handled the remaining 153 published papers. Fitch and Nei's prodigious efforts are primarily responsible for the rapid pro-

Table 1
Impact Factors^a of Evolutionary Journals^b

Journal	1985 ^c	1991
<i>Molecular Biology and Evolution</i>	2.912	4.126
<i>Genetics</i>	3.024	3.852
<i>Evolution</i>	2.675	3.082
<i>Trends in Ecology and Evolution</i>	2.985
<i>J. Molecular Evolution</i>	2.655	2.972
<i>American Naturalist</i>	3.047	2.464
<i>American Zoologist</i>	2.653	2.333
<i>Evolutionary Ecology</i>	1.673
<i>J. Human Evolution</i>	0.477	1.570
<i>Evolutionary Biology</i>	4.133	1.400
<i>Genetics, Selection and Evolution</i>	0.792	1.114
<i>J. Theoretical Biology</i>	0.970	1.061
<i>Plant Systematics and Evolution</i>	0.565	0.604

^a The impact factor is the average number of times that articles from the previous year of the journal were cited during the year indicated.

^b Impact factors for other evolutionary journals were lower than those in this table.

^c 1985 is the first year for which data for *MBE* are available.

gress of the journal throughout its first decade. Masatoshi Nei is quite correct in stating that he has never heard of another editor who put so much effort into a journal as has Walter Fitch. I have never heard of any pair of editors who have given so much of their time and effort to creating and developing a journal. The field of molecular evolution owes both of them an enormous debt. Their efforts have not only created a journal, they have solidified and brought a fledgling field to maturity.

Not content with creating a world-class journal, Walter and Masatoshi decided early in 1992 that the field was ready to have its own fully functioning Society that would permit us to meet together on a regular basis.

When the Journal was first created, Walter and Masatoshi wisely decided that it was important for scientists, rather than the publisher, to own the journal, and they created a "paper" society for that purpose. In June of 1992 Nei organized an International Conference on Molecular Evolution at Pennsylvania State College, and at that Conference Fitch and Nei proposed the activation of that society. With Walter as its first President and with Masatoshi as its second, the Society has been assured the benefit of the same nurturing that they conferred on the Journal.

During the past decade the Journal has grown in both size and, inevitably, in price. Figure 1 shows how each has increased over the first 10 volumes. Figure 2 shows that, despite inflation that has increased the cost-of-living index by 43.6% over that time, the cost to individual subscribers per published page has decreased to 65% of its 1984 level. *MBE* was a good buy when it was first created, and it is a considerably better buy now, both in terms of cost and content.

Journals serve at least two constituencies: readers and authors. *MBE* tries to serve its readers by publishing well-written high-quality research that is of significant interest to molecular evolutionists, other evolutionary biologists, and other molecular biologists. It tries to serve its authors by providing a fair and rapid review process that actively encourages and nurtures effective communication. Now, with the activation of the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution, *MBE* serves a third constituency, the Society itself. *MBE* will now serve as a major organ of communication for the Society by publishing announcements, Society bylaws, minutes of the annual business meeting, etc. In order to facilitate communication between Society members and their officers, *MBE* publishes the addresses etc. of the officers

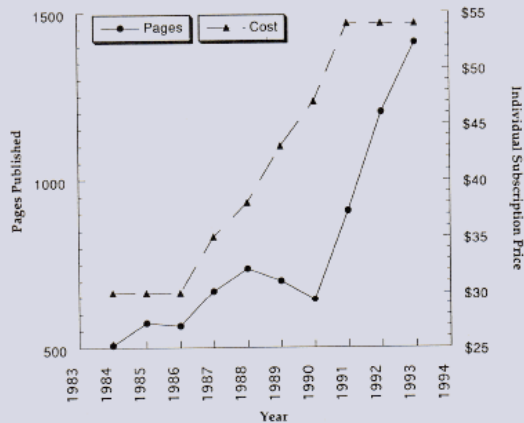


FIGURE 1

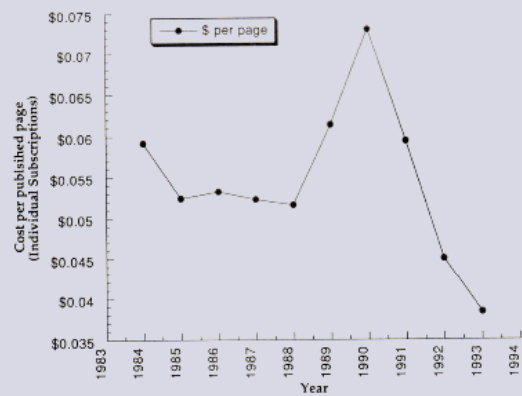


FIGURE 2

to encourage members to voice both concerns and suggestions to these officers.

Journal editors have relatively few means to determine how well they are doing their jobs. We can measure our effectiveness indirectly by observing increased rates of manuscript submission and increased quality of those manuscripts—although those are very subjective measures of effectiveness. Another, more quantitative, measure is provided by the “impact factor” that is calculated by the Institute for Scientific Information. Impact factor is the average frequency with which articles in a journal are cited. Table 1 shows the impact factor for *MBE*, compared with that of other journals that are either devoted primarily to evolution or that often publish evolutionary papers. Under the guidance of Walter Fitch and Masatoshi Nei, *MBE* immediately became one of the leaders in the field of evolutionary biology. Since

then it has not only risen to become the clear leader, it has increased its impact more than any of the other journals listed.

While those indirect measures can provide some long-term idea of effectiveness, they are not very useful for identifying immediate problems. We depend on both readers and authors to let us know when we are not doing some part of our job well enough. Please phone, write, fax, or send E-mail to me to voice your concerns, complaints, and suggestions.

I would like to say that I look forward to improving *MBE* over the next few years, but given the standard set by Walter Fitch and Masatoshi Nei, I am not sure that is very realistic. I do, however, look forward to maintaining the quality of *MBE*.

BARRY G. HALL
Editor