

# Editor's Annual Report—May 27, 1998

Covering the period from May 28, 1997, through May 27, 1998

## Manuscript Flow

We received 356 submissions during this period, compared with 304 submissions during about the same period last year. This represents a 17% increase in submitted manuscripts. During this period, we accepted 171 manuscripts, compared with 140 during the similar period last year. This represents a 22% increase in accepted manuscripts. Our acceptance rate is thus about 48%, up slightly from last year's 46%. Of the 356 manuscripts received during this period, 113 have been accepted, 135 have been rejected, and 108 are still active.

In 1997 (volume 14), we published a total of 1,353 pages (compared with the 1,400 pages I projected for volume 14 in last year's annual report). We have now completed the August 1998 issue and are working on September. At this point, we estimate 1,080 published pages through August, which translates to an estimated 1,612 pages for volume 15. Thus, we expect to publish about 19% more pages in 1998 than we did in 1997. (Note added on September 18, 1998: with volume 15 now completed, we estimate publishing 1,827 pages; i.e., a 30% increase from volume 14.)

In summary, 1998 has been another year of significant growth. It is important that Council takes growth into account in projecting the 1999 budget. In last year's report, I predicted that if growth continued as it had in 1997, we would publish a little over 1,600 pages, and that prediction appears to be holding up. Based on continued growth at the 1998 rate, I can now project publishing a little over 1,900 pages in 1999. Since the cost is about \$59 per page, and we recover on average about \$26 per page in page charges, those additional pages will cost the Society about \$10,000. We must either be prepared to meet those expenses out of current income levels, and thus reduce our income by about \$10,000, or we must be prepared to raise our subscription rates. Council must keep in mind that, while our growth reflects the continuing respect enjoyed by *MBE*, that same growth costs money.

## Associate Editors

Naoyuki Takahata and Alan Rogers decided to step down and will be sorely missed.

Our Associate Editors are an exceptionally hardworking group of individuals, and both *MBE* and I owe them a debt of gratitude. Nearly half of the Associate Editors have become Departmental Chairs or the equivalent during their time of service to *MBE*, and all of them are burdened with significant other responsibilities. Despite these responsibilities, they hunt down reviewers, nag them to complete reviews in a timely fashion, nurture authors whose science exceeds their writing capability, and put up with my nagging **them** when inevitable delays occur. It is their judgments, both positive and neg-

ative, that have allowed *MBE* to grow by 60% over the last 5 years while maintaining its position as the leading primary-literature journal in the field of evolution.

## Membership and Subscription Numbers

I am becoming concerned about the steady decline in membership that we are seeing. The April issue was mailed to 1,221 subscribers (members + institutions). That can be compared with the April 1996 issue, which was mailed to 1,303 subscribers.

We now have month-by-month data on member and subscriber numbers for 1996, for 1997, and through April 1998. Table 1 summarizes the information. For both members and institutions, by April we have 93.5% of the final number.

Looking at the total number of subscribers, it looks as though we are holding fairly steady at around 1,440. That is **only** because there has been a steady growth in institutional subscriptions that has offset a steady decline in members. Our membership is declining at about 2% per year, and we need to figure out why this is the case.

In fact, because about 10% of our current members are **new** members, what we are seeing is that something like 12% of our members have decided not to continue membership. If we are attracting new members at that rate, why are we not growing at 10% per year?

From a financial perspective, we are actually better off, because each institutional subscription brings in five times as much as a member subscription. At the same time, a steady decline in membership is a source of concern, because it suggests that we are not satisfying a significant number of our members. I find it difficult to understand the source of the problem, but that may be because I am too close to it.

We are steadily increasing our "product" in the sense that the number of pages and the number of articles we provide have been growing steadily over this period. Last year, we saw a 15% growth, and this year, it is about a 19% growth. The problem is therefore unlikely to be member dissatisfaction with the amount of product for the money.

While it is certainly impossible for the Editor to be completely objective about the quality of the Journal, the external criterion that is usually measured, the "Impact Factor," has also been steadily increasing. When I took over the Editorship, the impact factor for *MBE* was 4.126 (1991 data). By 1995, it had risen to 5.399, and in 1996, it was 5.969. During that entire period, *MBE* has enjoyed the highest impact factor of all journals that publish primary papers in any area of evolution (including *Genetics*).

The question remains: If we are the leading journal in evolution, and we steadily increase the amount of product while holding costs constant, why is our

**Table 1**  
**Data on Member and Subscriber Numbers**

	April 1996	December 1996	April 1997	December 1997	April 1998	December 1998 (estimated)
Members .....	910	983	891	942	874	935
Institutions .....	442	471	461	487	470	499
Total .....	1352	1454	1352	1429	1344	1434

membership declining? I judge that this is a serious matter and one that warrants active investigation by Council.

I have begun that investigation by discussing the situation with the new Editor of *Genetics*. It turns out that they are seeing exactly the same trend, and that it is most striking among young members, i.e., student members. GSA is worried too, but really doesn't know what to do about it.

I have asked Allen Press to do two things for us: (1) to give us a breakdown of membership number by regular and student members and by region (North America, Europe, elsewhere) as of April and December of 1996, 1997, and 1998, and (2) to determine if the other Society journals they handle are going through the same thing. It may well be that the disturbing trend is uni-

versal and reflects a changing scientific culture and not something that SMBE is doing wrong.

#### **New Editor**

In mid-September of this year, Simon Eastal will assume responsibility as Editor of *Molecular Biology and Evolution*. When I accept the last manuscript for volume 15, my responsibilities will be ended, and everything will be turned over to Simon. At that time, I will also cease being a member of Council.

It has been an interesting 5 years, and I wish both Simon and the Society the very best for the next 5 years.

Barry G. Hall  
May 27, 1998