

# Editor's Report for 2008

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In October 2007, my term as Editor-in-Chief of MBE began with the close of Bill Martin's. The Journal and the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution owe Bill a great debt for his energetic leadership over the preceding 4 years.

## Changing of the Guard

Also leaving the Editorial Board after many years of service were Jonathan Eisen, Hope Hollocher, Laura Katz, Franz Lang, Geoffrey McFadden, Marta Wayne, and Jiangzhi Zhang. I give them my sincere thanks for their insights and judgment. I am deeply grateful to the eminent scientists who have graciously agreed to serve as Associate Editors (AEs): Carlos Bustamante, Asger Hobolth, Hideki Innan, Yi-Ju Li, Rasmus Nielsen, and Jonathan Pritchard. Their expertise has broadened the scope of evolutionary biology embraced by MBE.

I thank James J. Bull, G. Brian Golding, Richard C. Lewontin, and Howard Ochman for agreeing to join the Editorial Advisory Board, which deliberates on various policy concerns and advises the Editor. I thank Stanley Sawyer and Yoshio Tateno for their service on the Editorial Advisory Board over an extended period.

Elizabeth Raffaele continues to serve as the bedrock of MBE, and the seamless transition is due to her. We on the Society side continue to rely on Oxford University Press (OUP) professionals Cathy Kennedy, Elizabeth Gardner, Cindy Gross, and Caitlyn Haase for their expert management and production.

## Vital Statistics

The publication, in December 1983, of Volume 1, Issue 1, of MBE coincided with a period of fundamental transformation in evolutionary biology. Under the leadership of cofounders Walter M. Fitch and Masatoshi Nei, MBE became a leading forum for the introduction and application of numerous fundamental methods for the evolutionary analysis of molecular genetic variation. Our challenge is to preserve and enhance the role of MBE in advancing both conceptual and empirical innovation.

**Impact Factor:** According to the June 2008 release by Thomson Reuters, MBE has an impact factor for 2007 of 6.438, a slight decline from the peak observed in the preceding year. This quantity represents the number of citations received in 2007 of articles published in 2005 and 2006 divided by the number of those articles. MBE ranks fourth among journals in Evolutionary Biology with respect to impact factor.

Among the measures designed to capture enduring influence is the *H* (Hirsch) index, high values of which indicate large numbers of highly cited articles. In the anal-

ysis of SCImago Journal & Country Rank (<http://www.scimagojr.com>) of 50 journals in the category of Evolution, Ecology, Behavior, and Systematics, MBE ranks first with respect to the *H* index. Further, this source ranks MBE as second among the 50 journals in its index of connectedness, reflecting high numbers of citations of MBE articles by articles in highly cited journals.

**Submissions:** Table 1 shows some basic attributes of publications in MBE since its move to OUP. It summarizes nearly 1,500 articles (excluding errata and editorial reports) in five complete Volumes (excluding the 19 Young Investigator articles in Volume 23) and the first 10 issues of Volume 25 (2008).

MBE's role as a leading source of significant works of lasting value relies on a strong flow of submissions of manuscripts of the highest quality. The number of submissions has increased monotonically over recent years and has remained strong into 2008, with 758 manuscripts submitted from January 1 to October 31, 2008 (compared with 754 during the same period of the preceding year).

From 2004 to 2007, the total number of pages published per volume underwent a greater than 20% increase. To establish a basis for comparison across years, table 1 also shows counts of color figures scaled to the number of article pages published in 2007. A linear regression analysis indicates that the average scaled number of color figures per article has grown by 0.13 per year over the past 5 years. This projection gives an expectation of 0.88 color figures per article for 2008, and the actual number through the October issue (0.93) suggests a continuing trend toward greater use of color.

**Recent Enhancements**

The Society and its journals exist to serve the community of molecular evolutionists. Our goal is to enhance the value added of publication in MBE by facilitating the appearance of significant works and promoting visibility and accessibility.

## Recent Enhancements

**Editorial Policy on Appeals of Final Decisions:** Primary responsibility for the assessment of substantive aspects of submissions, especially scientific quality and appropriateness for MBE, lies with the AEs. Their recommendations reflect their own expert opinions as well as their assessment of any reports from external reviewers. Procedural (as opposed to substantive) irregularities in the peer review process constitute the primary grounds for appeal of a final decision. Appeals must assume the burden of proof of allegations of incompetence, conflict of interest, or other charges.

**New Decision Category:** AEs may now recommend rejection of a manuscript, but with encouragement to resubmit. A comparison of recent decisions (October 2007 through May 2008) to decisions rendered in the same period of the preceding year indicates that the introduction of the new recommendation has had little effect on the overall rate of acceptance. The new category draws manuscripts

**Table 1**  
**Raw and Scaled Counts**

	20	21	22	23 <sup>a</sup>	24	25 <sup>b</sup>
Volume	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Manuscripts received	645	729	801	863	907	758
Articles <sup>c</sup>	229	236	259	247	284	220
Acceptance rate	35.5	32.4	32.3	28.6	31.3	29.0
Average page length	9.4	10.0	9.8	9.5	10.0	10.1
Article pages published	2,145	2,349	2,533	2,339	2,834	2,215
Color figures (actual)	56	81	93	126	258	204
Color figures (scaled <sup>d</sup> )	74	98	104	153	258	261

<sup>a</sup> Excluding Young Investigator articles.

<sup>b</sup> January through October issues.

<sup>c</sup> Research Articles, Letters, and Reviews.

<sup>d</sup> Adjusted to 2,834 pages.

primarily from the other declination categories (immediate rejection without external review and rejection with resubmission discouraged). It appears that the primary effect of the change has been to permit closer examination of articles of high quality that require rather more than minor revision. A number of AEs have expressed support for this decision category, and a substantial fraction have kindly taken up the extra burden that working with authors to improve their submissions entails.

**Publication Fees:** At the 2007 SMBE meeting in Halifax, Canada, the SMBE Council approved a flat page charge of \$50 per page and a fee of \$450 per color figure, effective January 1, 2008. Together with the trend toward increasing use of color (table 1), we hope that the 40% reduction in the color figure fee will promote enhanced communication.

At the end of May 2008, OUP announced increases in the charges made to authors who opt for immediate Open Access (OA) to articles published in MBE and other OUP journals participating in the Oxford Open initiative (see <http://www.oxfordjournals.org/oxfordopen/>). At the 2008 SMBE meeting in Barcelona, Spain, the SMBE Council approved the inclusion of page charges for eight pages in the OA fee. Against the increase in OA rates, this action in effect reduces the total cost of OA publication in MBE by \$100 for authors from subscribing institutions and by \$200 for authors from nonsubscribing institutions.

**Look and Feel:** Beginning with the January issue of Volume 25 (2008), OUP moved MBE to its printer in Singapore, reducing manufacturing and distribution costs. We took the opportunity to upgrade the quality of the paper, to a matte finish from glossy (“dated,” according to OUP Production). Further, issues of MBE now appear online at the end of the month preceding the indicated month and in the mail at the beginning of the indicated month. Since the September 2008 issue, all MBE papers start on the recto side, resolving previous problems affecting reprints.

We owe Dan Graur our deepest gratitude for the continued gracious donation of his art for the cover of MBE.

**Green MBE:** We are presently experimenting with measures to reduce the carbon footprint of MBE. In response to the offer of an opt-out option for paper issues of MBE, nearly 10% of AEs have chosen to suspend delivery.

On a suggestion from Chris Simon, former Editor of “Systematic Biology,” issues of MBE have arrived without mailing bags at addresses in the United States since July 2008. Postal regulations preclude elimination of mailing bags to non-US addresses, but beginning with the September issue, those mailings now use biodegradable bags. Subscribers are asked to report any problems with paper or online issues of MBE to the OUP Customer Services department ([http://www.oxfordjournals.org/contact\\_us.html#custserv](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/contact_us.html#custserv)).