

Editorial

Communication has always been the foundation of good science. From the time when Charles Darwin wrote letters back and forth with other scientific colleagues of his era, to the present-day rapid exchange of files over the internet. The way scientists share their findings with each other and with the world has been shifting in an increasingly technological world.

In the recent past, science journals were paper-only, and subject to fees for those who wished to publish and payment for those who wished to read. Academic libraries, of course, have subscriptions to the most popular journals, but not all readers are connected to a university. Increasing digitization means digital articles may be downloaded and read in an instant, but many journals still charge for access, and publication fees for researchers remain high in most cases. This may be a challenge for those who may not have the financial means, including students and early career researchers and those from countries in marginalised countries. Socioeconomic status can be a barrier, but that does not mean these ideas are less deserving of dissemination and may also lead to an unfair bias in publication toward those who can afford to pay. Diamond Open Access journals are changing how we access information, with journals that are free to read, and with no charge for publishing your work. Additionally, it can be challenging to get a foot in the door of the world of scientific publication. Student journals can be instrumental in opening that door, allowing new researchers to enter the collective conversation of science. Witnessing the publication process from behind the scenes lends a valuable perspective for students and researchers.

Serving on the editorial board of a student journal is also a great way to learn about the inner workings of the publishing universe, gaining insights into what journal editors are looking for, how the process works, how to review and evaluate submissions, giving and receiving meaningful feedback, and most of all, learning about peer review. Peer review is the foundation of scientific research. I firmly believe that every scientist needs to learn how to review, and they will become a better writer, and a better scientist, for it. Collaborating as a team and communicating with authors is also an incredibly valuable skill that comes with being a part of a project like this. Our editorial board consists of a mix of current students and alumni of the Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health (BWEH) masters programme at the University of Edinburgh, and the journal helps foster relationships between these two groups.

It is my hope that *The Open Journal of Biodiversity and Ecosystems* will also serve as a bridge between learning and doing, between students, alumni, and researchers, between art and science, and between scientific knowledge and its audiences. On a rapidly changing planet, we all need to stay informed on the issues of biodiversity, conservation, ecology, ecosystems, nature, sustainability, and human behaviour, as well as the policies and governance underpinning these valuable concepts. Understanding how ecological systems work, how humans impact them and how we can influence other humans to make changes in their behaviour are all instrumental in building a safe and livable planet for all. With no paywall, open access journals can help more people can gain an understanding of this knowledge and the importance of maintaining the natural systems that support life on our planet.

Our journal will be filled with not only standard journal articles but also science letters, project reports, photography, art, book reviews, and reflective writing. Our aim is for this journal to encompass a wider range of thinking and expression, in line with the interdisciplinarity that is a cornerstone of the BWEH programme. Humans tend to compartmentalize ideas into tidy boxes like science, art, humanities, but more and more we see how these concepts blend together. Art and the keen sense of observation, along with an appreciation of beauty blends gently into studies of the world around us. Meanwhile, in order to bring about the change this planet needs, we need the sociological understanding of how best to bring about shifts in human behaviour. Science is not performed in isolation, but requires collaboration across many disciplines. Open access journals also mean that the general public can find information directly at its source, and enhance their own scientific literacy and critical thinking skills.

In this issue, we will hear from researchers on urban bird diversity in Germany, land use and ecosystem degradation from Malawian wetlands to the Andes mountains, weaknesses in wildlife laws in Pakistan. We also have a book review centering around our food systems and a brief communication on the ecosystem services provided by large whales. We feel particularly honoured to include a reflection of the BWEH programme that has brought us all together, to celebrate the 15th anniversary, which took place in 2025. May you find within these pages, content that is informative, insightful, and thought provoking, that furthers your understanding of the issues our authors and contributors have presented.

Thanks and Acknowledgements

I would like to thank our hardworking, dedicated editorial team, including original founding members who have moved on but contributed during the formative stage, reviewers, our faculty advisors, the entire BWEH program, the staff at Edinburgh Diamond, and the Public Knowledge Project for their journal software and editorial courses, the authors and contributors who have entrusted us with their work, with special thanks for your patience while we paused our journal work during a difficult time for my family.

Pamela McDormand, managing editor, *The Open Journal of Biodiversity and Ecosystems*

We hope you enjoy our inaugural issue of The Open Journal of Biodiversity and Ecosystems. To find out more about making a submission, becoming involved with our editorial board, or to sign up for notification of future issues, please visit our website:

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