

Lindsay Haddon, Anthony Davy, David Gibson & Michael Hutchings.

Journal of Ecology, British Ecological Society, 26 Blades Court, Deodar Road, Putney, London SW15 2NU, UK. (Lindsay@BritishEcologicalSociety.org).

Turn-round times for submission

We are pleased to have recorded a significant reduction in the time to publication in 2002: accepted papers are now being published, on average, less than 10 months after initial receipt, compared with 13 months a year ago, and there is the prospect of further improvement still. Mean times to first decision remain roughly constant at just over 12 weeks, but time from then to acceptance has been cut by nearly a month to under 12 months.

Hot topics

It is particularly pleasing when our papers are selected for feature in other publications. Recently, these have included Gersani *et al.* (2001) whose finding that the responses of plants to competition may include root proliferation was discussed in a Research Update in *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* (Callaway 2002). Two other topics that have attracted attention, given the likelihood of climate changes, are flood-prone ecosystems and changing distribution limits. The impact of various factors on the ecology of mangroves has been reported (e.g. Clark *et al.* 2001, Minchinton 2001 and Clarke & Kerrigan 2002) and one paper (Middleton & McKee 2001) appeared as Editor's Choice in *Science* (Chin 2001) because of its value for modelling the effects of rising sea-levels. Responses at the tree-line appear to vary (Cuevas 2002; Kullman 2002) but, as pointed out in *Nature*, News and Views (Moore 2002), properly validated reconstructions from pollen records (Schauffler & Jacobsen 2002) provide useful insights into the changes that have followed similar events in the past.

Editorial policy

Papers should have a broad interest, and submission of reports that break new ground or advance our understanding of ecological principles are particularly welcomed. Standard papers may therefore be short (providing the topic is important and timely) or present more detailed accounts (although these should not normally exceed 12 printed pages). We also accept Essay Reviews and Forum Papers, and will continue to carry in most issues a description of at least one species in our ongoing account of the Biological Flora of the British Isles.

Our aim is that the content of the Journal will reflect the changing emphasis in our subject area and we

therefore urge authors to consider submitting their best and most current work to us. The importance of a journal is reflected in both institutional and individual subscriptions which continue to hold up well. We have a consistently high ISI citation index and, in addition, many papers continue to be cited for a considerable period of time (half-life of greater than 10 years).

We hope that readers will continue to find the Journal interesting and informative. We are always pleased to hear readers' views about the contents of the Journal.

Introduction of electronic submission

To streamline the review process further, *Journal of Ecology* will implement a fully web-based system for submission and review of manuscripts at the beginning of 2003. The submission site for all British Ecological Society Journals will be at <http://britishecologicalsociety.manuscriptcentral.com>, and a link (and Instructions to Authors) will also be available from the Journal's home pages at www.blackwellpublishing.com/journals/jec and www.BritishEcologicalSociety.org.

Online submission and review has many advantages, including straightforward and rapid submission of manuscripts and their immediate availability to reviewers for viewing online or downloading. Report forms for reviewers will be available online and all communication can be conducted by e-mail. In addition to savings in time and mailing costs for authors and reviewers, there will be increased accessibility to the editorial office from all over the world. We hope that these innovations will lead to reductions in handling time at all stages.

We are confident that this move will bring benefits to all those involved in working with the Journal and therefore hope that all our contacts will work with us through the transition. In particular, we hope that our many referees will continue to support us as the procedures change, as we will remain dependent on them to find the time to evaluate manuscripts. Our thanks go to all the colleagues who readily agree to help, despite other commitments: their prompt and efficient services are very much appreciated (see pp. xxx–xxx). It is easy to overuse individual referees, particularly in popular subject areas, and we therefore expect that authors of papers submitted to the Journal will agree to review.

Accessing the Journal online

Issues of *Journal of Ecology* published from 1999 onwards are available through Blackwell Publishing's digital service. Registering via www.blackwell-synergy.com will allow readers to receive Tables of Contents as soon as a new issue becomes available. The problems following the launch of the new version have almost all

been resolved, but please continue to let us know if you have difficulty with particular articles (including access to electronic appendices).

The entire back catalogue is now available online, with archive issues (i.e. those more than 3 years old) available through JSTOR (www.jstor.org). Members of the British Ecological Society can subscribe to a new service offering access to electronic copies of all four of the Society's journals (including *Journal of Ecology* from its first issue in 1913) at an extremely advantageous rate (see www.BritishEcologicalSociety.org).

Young Investigator's Prize 2002

Twenty-one papers were considered for the John L. Harper Prize this year and it is pleasing that over a fifth of manuscripts published in the Journal come from workers at the start of their research careers. The authors concerned came from all over the world, including some less well developed countries. Four papers stood out because they represented a significant conceptual advance and/or were potentially valuable to a wide range of ecologists. The editors therefore offer their congratulations to Tara Rajaniemi, Merel Soons, Joachim Strengbom and, particularly, Emilio Bruna, who is the winner of the 2002 prize.

Emilio completed his Bachelor's (1994) and Master's (1995) degrees at University of California-San Diego, where he studied the evolution of Pacific Island skinks, before moving to University of California-Davis to work towards a PhD with Susan Harrison and Sharon Strauss. His doctoral research, completed in 2001 and carried out at Brazil's Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project, was on the consequences of fragmentation for plant population dynamics. This has been followed by a National Science Foundation Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship, during which he studied ant-plant mutualisms with the BDFFP's Heraldo Vasconcelos. He is now continuing his work on plant demography as an Assistant Professor at University of Florida, where he has a joint appointment in the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation and the Center for Latin American Studies.

The editors agreed that Bruna *et al.* (2002) is a clearly motivated study of the effects of fragmentation in tropical forests and that the paper is well written throughout. The study highlights a disturbing reduction in growth of an understorey herb when transplanted in Amazonian forest fragments compared to transplants in continuous forest. The experimental approach is extremely good and careful: the transplant/replant approach used gets around the difficulty of having studied four quite different fragments and the relatively long time over which the study was conducted suggests that the results are robust, rather than transitory. The results are clean and clear, and are used well to make important general points. Overall, the messages about effects of fragmentation on future performance of species are not only powerful when used in

connection with forest habitats, but can probably be generalized to other types of fragmented habitats. Fragmentation of habitats has proved a important topic in the past couple of years, featuring in several of the short-listed papers (Soons & Heil 2002; Strengbom *et al.* 2002) as well as in other papers in the journal (Groppe *et al.* 2001; Kéry *et al.* 2001; Dupre & Ehrlen 2002; Luijten *et al.* 2002; Murren 2002; Vergeer *et al.* 2003).

Rajaniemi (2002) addresses a fundamental ecological concept (competition) and describes hypothesis-testing research on an important issue which, if solved, would represent a considerable advance in understanding of community structure. We especially liked her dissection of the impact of different types of resource limitation on community diversity. Soons & Heil (2002) also address a conceptual issue (colonization ability), with ramifications relating to many aspects of ecology. Strengbom *et al.* (2002) is a well-written and carefully argued paper, describing some elegant experiments to address what may appear to be a rather esoteric problem, but which may prove to be more important, given the widespread occurrence of nitrogen pollution by atmospheric deposition.

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