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EDITORIAL

Journal of Animal Ecology in 2023: Looking back and looking forward

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We want to start by acknowledging that 2023 was a tough year for many of us in many ways, as well as the billions of people who have likely never heard of the *Journal of Animal Ecology*. Against the backdrop of recent tragedies, throughout 2023, *Journal of Animal Ecology* has continued to publish the best fundamental research in animal ecology to underpin understanding and protecting species and their natural settings. Given what else was going on in the world, it does seem a bit odd to write about what happened to *Journal of Animal Ecology* in 2023, but for those of us for whom it was possible, doing our research, writing, and reading papers, even editing and reviewing papers, all likely served as a respite. So what did *Journal of Animal Ecology* get up to in 2023?

Early in the year, we co-organized a cross-journal special feature on *Leveraging Natural History Collections* to ask questions about global change biology. Associate Editor Alison Davis Rabosky and Natalie Cooper, Senior Editor at *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, deserve a special round of applause for shepherding this special feature to the finish line. One major outcome of this special feature was that many of the authors convened at the Natural History Museum in London (thanks again to Natalie for organizing!) for a symposium to highlight the findings published in the Special Feature. The major theme that emerged from both the Special Feature and the symposium was that natural history collections can and should be leveraged to address a whole host of questions about the response of biodiversity to ongoing global change, but our community of ecologists could do a better job of singing the praises of natural history collections and museums.

We also participated in another Special Feature, this time with *Functional Ecology*, on the *Mechanisms and Consequences of Infection-induced Phenotypes*. Another special feature (this one joint with *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*) focused on *Contemporary Methods for Studying Animal Sociality in the Wild*. Looking ahead, three other special features are accumulating submissions as we speak, and we look forward to publishing them in 2024: One on *Marine Heatwaves*; one on *Global Energy Transition: ecological impact, mitigation, and restoration*; and one on *Intraspecific Variation in Ecology and Evolution*. These special features really highlight what *Journal of Animal Ecology* is increasingly focused on: fundamental aspects of the ecology of animals, but also important, timely and emerging issues. Our internal data demonstrate that these special features attract increased attention to the papers we publish, and, to be honest, they are just really fun to organize and promote. So if you have any ideas for special features, please do get in touch!

This year, we also published one of the journal's most read articles since 2020! The paper by Koger et al. (2023; deCastro-Arrazola et al., 2023) entitled 'Quantifying the movement, behaviour and environmental context of group-living animals using drones and computer vision' has been read over 7000 times since its publication, putting it in the top 2% of all papers published since 2020. This Research Methods Guide paper was also a part of the Special Feature on *Active Remote Sensing for Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation*. The article provides an important new development in how we monitor and protect the social fabric of animal societies at a larger scale than previously possible, thus enabling better conservation of animal

well-being. The paper itself also highlights a main front in animal ecology research: the usage of novel technology to tackle classical questions. We welcome more submissions at this interface—and as ever, if you would like to discuss proposals, get in touch with our Commissioning Editor, Rob Salguero-Gómez.

In addition to publishing papers on everything from the functional ecology of dung beetles (deCastro-Arrazola et al., 2023) and global variation in nest cup size of passerine birds (Vanadzina et al., 2023) to the thermal physiology of urban ants (Youngsteadt et al., 2023), we recruited 19 new associate editors through an open call to our Editorial Board. *Journal of Animal Ecology* is proud of the diversity reflected among our Associate Editors, especially the fact that we have achieved and maintained gender parity on our Editorial Board (currently 49F:41M), but we also recognize we must work to continue to attract, and attract more, research on the ecology of animals from all corners of the earth, and across all tips of the phylogenetic tree of animals, from honeybees (Hasenjager et al., 2024) to killer whales (Remili et al., 2023), and anything in between.

We also continued our long tradition of celebrating the work published in *Journal of Animal Ecology*. We awarded the 2022 Elton Prize for best original research published in the journal by an early career researcher to Pablo Augusto P. Antiqueira for the research article 'Warming and top predator loss drive direct and indirect effects on multiple trophic groups within and across ecosystems' (Antiqueira et al., 2022). The shortlisted papers for the Elton Award exemplify the breadth and depth of what *Journal of Animal Ecology* publishes: There were papers about robot frogs (Caldart et al., 2022), interaction networks (Parra et al., 2022) and latitudinal gradients and range-expanding species (Jones et al., 2022). We also awarded the Sidnie Manton Award to Ellis-Soto et al. (2021) for their paper entitled 'A methodological roadmap to quantify animal-vectored spatial ecosystem subsidies' which lays out a framework for thinking about how animals influence the structure, function and connection of ecosystems via deposition of nutrient subsidies. The Sidnie Manton Award aims to inspire early career researchers working on any aspect of animal ecology to publish review or synthesis papers.

We also published 51 blog posts, in both English, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew and Swahili (thanks Julie Sheard and Beth Preston). In fact, it was a record year for the blog: There were 23,114 visits to the blog from 180 countries. One new initiative that we are really excited about and led the launch of is Key Concepts in Ecology, a series of reading lists designed to help ecologists learn about some of the key topics in ecology, with examples from papers published by *Journal of Animal Ecology* and our sister journals in the BES. We know that many folks use the primary literature in courses or want to point interested students to papers published in the peer-reviewed literature on what you lecture. Go take a look for yourself here and see if you can implement any of the papers in your courses, or learn about a concept that you might not be familiar with.

So, we are proud of our work (and your work!) in 2023. But what are we most looking forward to in 2024?

Journal of Animal Ecology has been publishing work that has shaped the field since 1932, and continues to do so. We also continue to push the frontiers of the field into new areas and highlight new technologies. Two forthcoming special features point to *Journal of Animal Ecology*'s focus on the future while not forgetting about the past: One special feature in the works focuses on the growing field of macrosystems ecology and while another will revisit some of Charles Elton's seminal work published in *Journal of Animal Ecology*. (As an aside, one of us, NJS, would like to note that there were two papers by Elton in the first issue of *Journal of Animal Ecology*, both on ants!). We are also beginning to draft out something on what Animal Ecology, the field, not the journal, actually is. Of course, it is anything to do with the ecology of animals, but it seems that there is sometimes a perception that Animal Ecology, or at least the *Journal of Animal Ecology*, focuses purely on something affecting the animals, say, for example, how predators affect population dynamics of prey or how climate affects phenotypes. But we are increasingly publishing papers on how animals affect the ecosystems they are embedded in rather than simply respond to changes in the environment (e.g. Ellis-Soto et al., 2021; Ferraro et al., 2023; Grant et al., 2022; McCary & Schmitz, 2021; Swain et al., 2023).

Understanding the ecology of animals, across temporal, spatial and evolutionary scales is more important now than likely ever before. And we learn about the ecology of animals by the work you submit to our journal. We are of course as excited as ever to see what you submit to our Journal, and to continue to work with you to get the best research in animal ecology published! Though it takes time to collect the data, analyse the data, write the manuscript, submit the manuscript, review the manuscript and revise the manuscript, we feel it is time well spent.

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