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Journal Interviews : 2008 : 2008 September - BMC Evolutionary Biology

JOURNAL INTERVIEWS - 2008

September 2008



BMC Evolutionary Biology

A Featured Journal Interview

According to a recent analysis published by ScienceWatch.com, BMC Evolutionary Biology is having a growing impact among journals in the field of Biology & Biochemistry. The journal's citation record in Essential Science IndicatorSSM from Thomson Reuters includes 608 papers cited a total of 2,819 times between January 1, 1998 and April 30, 2008.

Published by BioMed Central, BMC Evolutionary Biology is an online, open-access, peer-reviewed journal that has been publishing articles on "all aspects of molecular and non-molecular evolution of all organisms, as well as phylogenetics and palaeontology" since 2001.

In the interview below, we talk with publisher Dr. Matt Cockerill about the history and citation record of the journal.

SW: Did you expect BMC Evolutionary Biology to become highly cited, or is this surprising to you?

Not at all. Articles published in our open-access journals get a lot of visibility, and many of the top researchers in the field of evolutionary biology are strong advocates of open access and choose to publish in our journals. We've therefore been pleased, but not surprised, by *BMC Evolutionary Biology*'s strong Impact Factor.

SW: How would you account for the increased citation rate of BMC Evolutionary Biology?

Evolutionary biology is a field that has been profoundly affected by genomic and computational approaches. BioMed Central's experience was that authors in fields such as bioinformatics and genomics were amongst the first to embrace publication in open-access journals, probably because Open Source software and openness with respect to data sharing are both deeply ingrained in those communities. We are now seeing that culture of openness spreading into adjacent fields, such as evolutionary biology, and this in turn has ensured that *BMC Evolutionary Biology* has been able to attract a substantial number of high-quality articles.

SW: Was there a change in policy or editorial direction that might account for this?

Actually, it wasn't so much a matter of our editorial policy, but the fact that *BMC Evolutionary Biology* was not tracked by Thomson Reuters until 2004, so it did not receive its first Impact Factor until June 2007, even though it had been one of the most highly cited evolutionary biology journals for some time.

SW: What historical factors have contributed to the success of BMC Evolutionary Biology?

When an area of research undergoes rapid and profound change it provides an opportunity for new journals. Researchers often find that the scope and editorial policy of existing titles does not keep pace with developments in their field. *BMC Evolutionary Biology* certainly benefited from this. Being an online journal, with rapid peer review, unlimited color figures, and immediate publication on acceptance certainly gave it an advantage compared with traditional journals operating to print production schedules. Strong support from our international Editorial Board and Associate Editors has also been vital to the success of the journal.

SW: Have there been specific developments in the fields served by *BMC Evolutionary Biology* that may have contributed?

As discussed above, the growing importance of genomic and computational methods has no doubt played a significant role. The increased focus on "Evo Devo", i.e. understanding evolution in terms of modifications to developmental programs, is another trend which is changing the field and making it more interdisciplinary.

SW: How do you see your field(s) evolving in the next few years?

As the cost of whole-genome sequencing falls, meta-genomics will continue to grow in importance, as will the study of variation within individual species by the sequencing of the entire genomes of hundreds or thousands of individuals. This variation within a species is the crucial ingredient that makes natural selection possible, and so the prospect of a much fuller picture of this variation at the genomic level is hugely exciting for evolutionary biologists.

SW: What role do you see for your journal?

BMC Evolutionary Biology will continue to publish high-quality research in evolutionary biology, and break down barriers between different fields. Another key goal for the journal is to make it easier for researchers to share not just their results, but also the datasets that were analyzed to produce those results. We are working with the research community to define appropriate standards and recommendations to facilitate the sharing of such data.■

BMC Evolutionary Biology
Dr. Matt Cockerill, Publisher
BioMed Central, publishers

BMC Evolutionary Biology's most-cited paper with 98 cites to date:

Hedges SB, et al., "A molecular timescale of eukaryote evolution and the rise of complex multicellular life," *BMC Evol. Biol.* 4: art. no. 2, 28 January 2004. Source: *Essential Science Indicators* from Thomson Reuters.

Additional Information:

BMC Evolutionary Biology was named a **New Entrant** in Biology & Biochemistry in August 2008

Keywords: open access journals, evolutionary biology, genomics, computational approaches, data sharing, Open Source software.



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