

# PROLOGUE

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## Editorial Comment

This issue brings Volume 2 of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* to a close. We have now published 8 separate journals over 5 years. One of the major editorial issues we have faced and will continue to face is the constant vigil of an ever increasingly critical appraisal of our timeliness of publication. The world is changing rapidly as technological advances have made increasingly rapid dispersal of scientific information more readily available. The scientific world is constantly exposed to new outlets for publication. Traditional peer-reviewed journals such as ours are proliferating at an accelerating rate. Numerous non-peer-reviewed journals of varying quality and content have sprung up around the globe. Desktop publishing capability (which we utilize) has allowed numerous organizations, both scientific and popular, to publish with increasing ease and frequency.

One of the major issues that potential authors face is where to publish their research results among this plethora of choices. Of concern are two major issues: whether the contemplated publication outlet is peer-reviewed and whether the timeliness of its publication process is acceptable. The gold standard for most researchers is to publish in a rigorously peer-reviewed journal of international scope held in high regard by the scientific community that also succeeds in keeping publishing delays to a minimum. However, some authors choose occasionally to circumvent these time-honored checks and balances on the publication process by publishing their results in non-peer-reviewed journals that specialize in rapid processing times of manuscripts. Such behavior, when it seeks only to speed the publication process without the necessary review of dedicated peers and editors, should be discouraged. The scientific community and its members need to practice collegiality when it comes to the race for publication; seeking to bypass the system in order to publish rapidly wins few friends and creates an air of confrontation little likely to foster future collaboration and scientific openness.

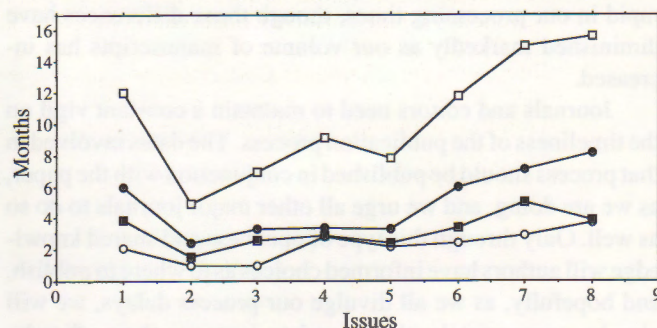
When evaluating which of several otherwise acceptable peer-reviewed journals to publish in, a primary consideration for authors is often the amount of delay inherent in that journal's publication process. Journals need to provide this information to authors so that they may make informed decisions regarding where to publish. Disclosure of specific processing dates by journals is paramount in this regard, and it is incumbent on all quality peer-reviewed journals to provide this information to their readership and authors.

As part of our public evaluation of our own timeliness of publication, we have begun publishing the dates of processing for all manuscripts that we publish. We list three dates: 1) *Received*: the date the manuscript was first submit-

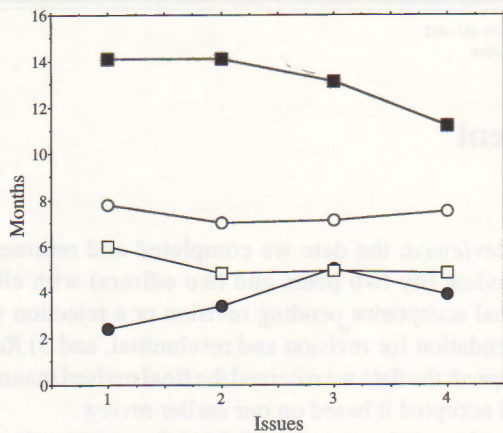
ted, 2) *Reviewed*: the date we completed and returned our initial review (by two peers and two editors) with either a provisional acceptance pending revision or a rejection with a recommendation for revision and resubmittal, and 3) *Revised and Accepted*: the date we received the final revised manuscript back and accepted it based on our earlier review.

Though we only started publishing these processing dates earlier in this volume, we have the data for all our published papers and have submitted the entire database to analysis. The results for the 8 issues of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* we have published are presented in Fig. 1 (representing a total of 160 papers). Our average time from Receipt to Review is 5.7 months per paper, but this time has recently gotten as long as 8.1 months, reflecting the increased work load of many more manuscripts over the last 4 issues as compared to the first 4. Our average time from Review to Acceptance is 2.5 months, recently as high as 3.7 months; these times represent author revision times and are beyond our control. Our average time from Acceptance to Publication is 3.4 months, recently as high as 5.0 months; these times represent the process of page-formatting and actual publication, kept relatively short by our in-house desktop publishing capabilities. Our average time from Receipt to Publication is 11.4 months, recently as high as 15.6 months, once again reflecting the increased work load of more than double the number of manuscripts published in Volume 2 (107 papers) as compared to Volume 1 (53 papers), in addition to the personal human delays created by the senior editor (AGJR) traversing an emotional and difficult major life change during the last two years.

When we compare ourselves against the benchmarks of the 5 other major herpetological journals based in the USA, we are proud of our record. Two of these journals, *Herpetological*



**Figure 1.** Average time delay (in months) for publication process steps for the 8 issues (2 volumes) of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*. ● = Received to Reviewed, ○ = Reviewed to Accepted, ■ = Accepted to Published, □ = Received to Published.

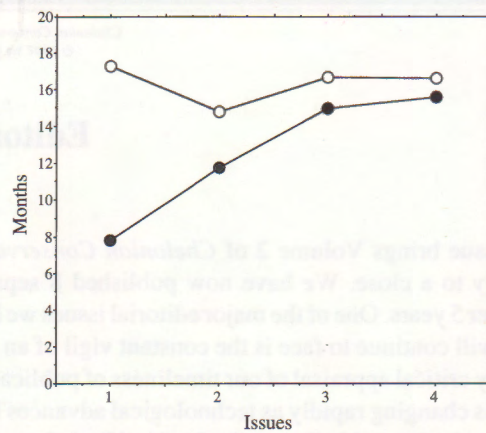


**Figure 2.** Average time delays (in months) for publication process from Accepted to Published in 4 separate journals for the most recent 4 issues. ● = *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, ○ = *Copeia*, ■ = *Herpetologica*, □ = *Journal of Herpetology*.

*Review* and *Herpetological Natural History*, publish no processing dates whatsoever. Two journals, *Herpetologica* and *Journal of Herpetology*, publish only dates of Acceptance, with no indication as to when the manuscript was Received, thereby giving only a very skewed and incomplete representation of the overall processing times involved. Only one journal, *Copeia*, publishes both dates of Receipt and Acceptance, but does not indicate a date of Review; however, the dates they provide allow an accurate evaluation of their overall processing times.

As part of our own evaluation we have calculated processing times as declared by the three journals that also publish this data. In Fig. 2 we present the time from Accepted to Published for the last 4 issues of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, *Herpetologica*, *Journal of Herpetology*, and *Copeia*. Our in-house desktop processing has allowed us to publish consistently more rapidly than any of these other journals, though only minimally faster than *Journal of Herpetology*. However, we have no way of comparing our overall results to those for *Journal of Herpetology*, as they do not publish their dates of Receipt. In Fig. 3 we present the time from Received to Published for the last 4 issues of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* and *Copeia*. Once again, we are consistently more rapid in our processing times, though those differences have diminished markedly as our volume of manuscripts has increased.

Journals and editors need to maintain a constant vigil on the timeliness of the publication process. The dates involved in that process should be published in conjunction with the paper, as we are doing, and we urge all other major journals to do so as well. Only through this type of openness and shared knowledge will authors have informed choices as to where to publish, and hopefully, as we all divulge our process delays, we will also be appropriately challenged to improve them, thereby benefitting the entire scientific community.



**Figure 3.** Average time delays (in months) for publication process from Received to Published in 2 separate journals for the most recent 4 issues. ● = *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, ○ = *Copeia*.

A second issue all scientific journals face is financial viability and self-sustainability. For the most part scientific journals make little or no profit; most are satisfied to break even or to incur only minor losses. We have been able over the course of our 5 years to maintain our losses to a minimum and there is no immediate danger of financial difficulty. We have been fortunate along the way to receive intermittent outside subsidy from our various partner organizations, most notably *Conservation International* and *Chelonia Institute*, with our shortfall being covered by *Chelonian Research Foundation*. However, as we have increased our output, more or less doubling the number of printed pages and published papers in Volume 2 as compared to Volume 1, our shortfall has rapidly increased.

As we compare our subscription price structure to the higher amounts other major herpetological journals are charging, recognizing that we need to move closer to financial self-sustainability, we realize that we can no longer maintain our rock-bottom prices. Consequently, for the first time ever, we need to raise subscription prices for our next volume. These price changes go into effect for Volume 3 which will cover 4 separate issues over the next two years. Subscribers who have already prepaid for Volume 3 will not be charged for the difference. We will increase regular individual subscriptions to \$40 from \$25, though we will add a new category for student subscriptions, keeping them at \$25. Institutional subscriptions will increase to \$75 from \$50, and foreign Air Mail surcharges will rise to \$30 from \$20. We will also add a new category for Contributing Members at \$100 and encourage those of you with the means and dedication to support our effort by subscribing at this level. As we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization any donations above \$40 are tax-deductible, and additionally, the generosity of Contributing Members will be acknowledged in the journal. Finally, let us again thank all of you, our authors and readers, for the wonderful support you've shown during these last several years.