

## EDITORIAL

### A new editor's 35 year perspective

I.C. Wilkie

Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ

E-mail: [iain.wilkie@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:iain.wilkie@glasgow.ac.uk)

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Following on from the publication of the Supplementary issue devoted to *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Scotland* conference, this is the first normal issue of Volume 27 of *The Glasgow Naturalist* (*TGN*) and the first appearing since I took over from Dominic McCafferty as Editor. Dominic had that responsibility from 2008 until 2017 and oversaw the publication of Volumes 25 and 26, which comprise a total of 11 issues, including one supplementary issue. He left the journal in rude health and it is therefore a daunting task to ensure that standards do not slip.

Fortunately I am not a complete novice regarding *TGN* editorial duties. I became a member of Glasgow Natural History Society (GNHS) in 1983. Although at that time the late Eric Curtis was Editor of *TGN*, shortly thereafter Ron Dobson took over this role. I have in my possession a letter dated 28th February 1984, which was written by Ron to a colleague of mine at Glasgow College of Technology (now Glasgow Caledonian University), who was also a GNHS member, inviting him join the *TGN* editorial committee as "zoological sub-editor". My colleague felt he could not take on the commitment and asked me if I was interested. I was indeed interested and thereby embarked upon a fascinating editorial adventure. The editorial committee at that time consisted of Ron Dobson, Jim Dickson, the late Allan Stirling and myself. Meetings were held in the University of Glasgow Botany Department (Bower Building) and were minuted. Each meeting started with the Editor reading through the (hand-written) minutes of the previous meeting. The sub-editors then introduced and gave their views on those submitted manuscripts they had been asked to evaluate by the Editor, and final decisions on the fate of submissions were endorsed by the whole committee. Little, if any, advice was sought from specialists outwith the editorial committee. All this is a far cry from today's procedures where members of the editorial committee communicate almost exclusively by e-mail and rarely meet as a group face-to-face, all contributions are peer-reviewed by external experts, and final decisions, whilst informed by reviewers' reports, are made largely by the Editor alone.

There have been other changes. In the letter mentioned above, Ron Dobson also noted that "Our authors tend to be rather inexperienced and we may have to do a lot of

rewriting to make papers acceptable." Neither of these points applies any longer. The majority of the articles in this and recent issues are by, or at least include amongst the authors, experienced professional biologists, and rarely is much rewriting required of submitted papers that get through the reviewing process. There are likely to be various reasons for these particular differences, which may, of course, be causally connected. Since it is now the case that submissions to *TGN* are rarely rejected, professionals have not been elbowing out amateurs in a bloody struggle for limited publication space, and therefore there have been two independent changes: (1) a decrease in the submission rate of articles from amateurs and (2) an increase in the submission rate from professionals. Change 1 is perhaps surprising in view of the growth of the Citizen Science movement (see Downie & Forster, 2019), and the popularity of natural history programmes on the TV, but it fits with the suggestion that "specialist amateurs are on the decline while more generalist volunteers and environmental enthusiasts are on the rise" (Lawrence, 2010; cited by Everett & Geoghegan, 2016). It also begs the questions: "How can we convert enthusiasts into specialists?" and "Is GNHS doing enough in this regard?" Change 2 may reflect increased appreciation by professional biologists of *TGN* "product quality", which (we hope) is approaching that of professionally managed biological journals, and of features such as online availability of articles both on the GNHS and Biodiversity Heritage Library websites (especially since they are online on the GNHS website prior to print publication) and printing in full colour (McCafferty, 2018); and/or it may be a sign of increasing scepticism about the use of journal impact factors and other metrics to assess and manage academic research (Wilsdon *et al.*, 2015), which is making professional biologists more "relaxed" about publishing in bibliometrically invisible journals; a survey of *TGN* authors' attitudes would be needed to test this hypothesis! Change 2 is desirable and requires the Editorial Committee to remain vigilant in maintaining standards. Change 1 needs to be reversed, so that *TGN* does not come to be perceived as off limits to amateur contributors. One way to encourage submissions from amateur naturalists might be to provide help with drafting articles: aspiring authors (only those with no previous publications in *TGN* would be eligible) would submit an article outline together with

relevant observations/data and literature references; if thought to have enough scientific value, the Editorial Committee would then use this material to assemble a full paper or short note, which would, like all other submissions, be subjected to external review. Another possibility would be to pair up amateurs with professionals. I would welcome views on these ideas.

This issue is notable in including the first six articles of a series that we are calling *On the Wildside Revisited: 200 Hundred Years of Wildlife in the Glasgow Botanic Gardens*. A similar series headlined *On the Wildside: the Natural History of the Glasgow Botanic Gardens* appeared 20 years ago in *TGN* 23(3,4). An informative introduction to the new series is provided by Downie & Forster (2019). The other contributions in this issue encompass a healthy diversity of taxa and geographical locations. Taxa range from fungi through vascular plants to a range of insects, the vertebrate-like invertebrate amphioxus, and an example of Creation's crowning glory - the naturalist-photographer. Locations, whilst dominated by Glasgow (not unexpectedly, in view of the new series), include Loch Lomond's shores (no product placement intended), the seas around Scotland from the Firth of Clyde to Shetland, and most of the continents of the wider world (for the purpose of making international comparisons of evolution education): *TGN* can certainly not be accused of being parochial. Some minor changes have been introduced into Volume 27: the journal title and other details are now printed on the spine cover; the names of external reviewers are now listed (see below); and some aspects of formatting have been standardised, such as only the initials of authors' first and middle names being included below the title of each paper, and common names of all organisms being printed without initial capitals. If readers have any further suggestions for improving the appearance and organisation of the journal, please communicate them to me or another member of the Editorial Committee.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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