

Nothing but the facts: a journey together

Peer review plays an essential role in academic quality control of scientific journals and is central to scholarly communication. It exists in many aspects of academia, including funding applications, career building, academic performance evaluation, and publishing. In regard to publishing, different forms of publication, from traditional hardcopies and on-line journals to preprint articles (e.g., arXiv: <https://arxiv.org/>, BioRxiv: <https://www.biorxiv.org/>), continue to fine-tune the requirements of peer review, and vice versa, peer review continuously refines the quality of publications.

In 2015, ORCID (<https://orcid.org/>), ScienceOpen (<https://www.scienceopen.com/>), Sense About Science (<https://senseaboutscience.org/>), and Wiley (<https://www.wiley.com/en-us>) initiated the annual global event, "Peer Review Week" (Meadows, 2019). By 2019, Peer Review Week has covered a wide variety of topics, including "Recognition for Review", "Transparency in Peer Review", "Diversity in Peer Review", and "Quality in Peer review". These are the same issues often discussed and considered by the Editorial Board of *Zoological Research* (ZR).

ZR adopts a journal-facilitated traditional single-blind pre-publication peer-review process, in which editors mediate all interactions between reviewers and authors; peer reviews are not published, and reviews are owned by the authors of said reviews. At the beginning of a new year, ZR would like to sincerely thank all reviewers for their rigorous work and dedication, particularly for maintaining the high standard of articles and helping ZR remain a useful literature resource. ZR recognizes our reviewers' contributions through the public acknowledgement column on the homepage of ZR (<http://www.zoores.ac.cn/EN/column/item32.shtml>), which is updated bi-monthly, and via the "annual personnel contribution award".

Here, we would like to invite all readers and authors of ZR to peruse some of our peer-review statistics. Before 2014, the year in which ZR began to publish in English only, we maintained a peer-review expert group of approximately 2 000 people, primarily Chinese scholars. After 2014, especially

since the introduction of our online submission system (ScholarOne Manuscripts, <https://mc03.manuscriptcentral.com/zr>) in September 2015, the total number of peer reviewers for ZR has doubled and now covers 46 countries worldwide.

From September 2015 to December 2019, ZR has received 610+ submissions, with 206 having been published in 25 issues (Vol.36(6)–Vol.40(6)). This has resulted in an overall rejection rate of approximately 67%. After the initial change in publishing language, which impacted our authorship and readership, ZR attempted to solicit new submissions, even running ScholarOne Manuscripts (for English submissions) and JournalX of Beijing Magtech S&T Co., Ltd (for Chinese submissions) parallelly for over 18 months. Despite this, the independent submission quantity dropped in 2015 and 2016. Thus, 61% (26 out of 43) and 74% (31 out of 42) of publications in 2017 and 2018 were invited contributions, respectively. Thanks to the enduring faith and generous support of readers and authors, ZR has now experienced a submission upturn, with overall submissions in 2019 the sum of those in 2017 and 2018 combined.

At present, more than 55% of submissions are rejected during the preliminary review stage conducted by a subject-expert editorial board member and/or journal editor. Excluding this proportion, or the ones are still under peer reviewing, a total of 200 manuscripts have gone through peer review via ScholarOne Manuscripts. Regarding these papers, invitations for review were sent to 1 951 scholars, with 607 accepting the invitation and completing the reviewing process. The average time and review report length for these submissions was 19 days and 476 words, respectively. Among the 607 reviewers, 33.7% (205) were from China, 11.9% (72) were from the US, followed by Japan (26, 4.3%), Australia (13, 2.1%), France, UK, and India (11, 1.8%).

Based on the survey of Vesper (2018), ZR does experience "reviewer fatigue" during the invitation process. On average, for each review to be completed, we must invite 3.2 scholars. However, when using review time and average report length as two parameters of efficiency, we currently achieve the global median level (19 vs. 16.4 days and 476 vs. 447 words, respectively) (Global State of Peer Review, 2018).

Thus, we are happy to say that, with the support of our readers, authors, and reviewers, ZR is on the right track in regard to our submissions and review process. Our articles cover classical aspects to cutting edge research within the zoological field. We thank the authors for trusting ZR with their

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discoveries and the reviewers for generously sharing their expertise with us.

To maintain the objectivity, independency, and efficiency of peer review, *ZR* endeavors to acquire feedback from the broader biological community by balancing reviewer gender and by selecting reviewers based on diverse geographic areas and career stages. To help in this, we kindly encourage invited reviewers and authors to consider the above objectives when recommending alternative reviewers or scholars during the submission process. *ZR* follows the Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers of Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE Council, 2017). If you wish to become more involved in the peer review of *ZR* or have any suggestions on what we can do better, please feel free to contact us at zoores@mail.kiz.ac.cn.

Thanks to the growing impact of *ZR* (Yao et al., 2019), we have seen a significant increase in submissions during the past year. Many publications, such as the Chinese tree shrew genome analysis (Fan et al., 2019), study of ecology and social system of northern gibbons (Guan et al., 2018), roles of ayu NOD2 in antibacterial innate immunity (Ren et al., 2019), pattern of allele-specific expression and alternative splicing in hybrids of domestic animals (Wang et al., 2019), and others, have received considerable attention in the field. 2020 is the 40th anniversary of the founding of *ZR*. We believe that with the full support of our authors, reviewers, editorial board members, and readers, *ZR* will continue its collaborative journey and achieve the status of a top journal in Zoology.

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