



EDITORIAL

IMPACT AND VALUE

With its focus on peer-reviewed analyses of data gained from marking birds, *Ringing & Migration* occupies a unique niche as an international ornithological journal. Whether driven by passion and curiosity or advancing the aims of conservation, a significant proportion of the data and effort that goes into many *Ringing & Migration* papers is funded only in part by public resources and relies heavily on the input of time, money and expertise of volunteer ornithologists at all levels. Across the landscape of science publishing, the standard of peer-reviewed papers has been transformed by the availability of computers for word processing, graphics and statistical analysis. *Ringing & Migration*, since its inception in 1975, has seen a similar increase in scientific and editorial standards and this will continue as we strive to publish the best ornithological research within the journal's niche.

Ornithologists, whether publicly-funded or not, naturally want to promote the results of their work to their peers, and publishing in a journal with a wide readership is important. *Ringing & Migration*, unlike many leading ornithological journals, has the potential to achieve that by being freely available online. The perceived prestige of a journal is also important; this is hard to define but one approach is to count the number of citations (references by other authors to papers published in a journal), relative to the total number of papers published by the journal over a specified period, giving an 'Impact Factor'. For many years, Thomson Reuter (previously under the name Institute for Scientific Information or ISI) have produced annual listings of Impact Factors for a range of journals (Garfield 2010). The dominance of the Thomson Reuter Impact Factors is such that many people and institutions use these as a measure of the worth of published papers. As a consequence, work published in journals with no Impact Factor can be regarded as of low value. The problem for *Ringing & Migration* is that, despite its status as a peer-reviewed ornithological journal (but possibly because of its specialised niche), it does not appear in Thomson Reuters citation indexes and does not have an 'official' Impact Factor. The 'Catch-22' is that we need to increase the citation rate of papers in *Ringing & Migration* to increase the perceived value of our science and achieve an Impact Factor, but authors may be discouraged from submitting their work to the journal because *Ringing & Migration* does not have such an Impact Factor.

As a metric to judge research quality, the number of citations alone is not a reliable measure: research of high

quality may receive few citations and *vice versa* (Anon 2010). Even mainstream science journals complain about the dominance of Impact Factors as a measure of worth (Hascall & Hanson 2010). Within ornithological journals, the specialised niche of *Ringing & Migration* also puts it at a disadvantage in the Impact Factor stakes. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. An alternative method in which citations are weighted by the quality or status of the citing journal (Bollen *et al* 2006, González-Pereira *et al* 2009) is the basis of the SCImago Journal and Country Rank (SJR) Indicator used to rank the extensive range of journals in the Elsevier Scopus database. As a more-considered measure of journal prestige, the SJR Indicator may well replace the Thomson Reuter Impact Factor for assessing journal status in the future (Bollen *et al* 2006). Using SJR Indicators for 2009 (www.scopus.com/source/eval.url), when ranked against the 18 ornithological journals in the Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports (2008 Impact Factors), *Ringing & Migration* comes 7th behind (in order) *Journal of Avian Biology*, *Ibis*, *Journal of Ornithology*, *Auk*, *Condor* and *Ardea*. Whether the current SJR ranking of *Ringing & Migration*, an increase on previous years, can be sustained is uncertain, but there is now huge potential for new technologies in combination with bird marking and new analysis tools to advance our understanding of bird biology. *Ringing & Migration* is the place to publish.

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