



Looking to the next 50 Volumes

The production of a peer-reviewed scientific journal is a considerable undertaking, particularly for a small organisation, largely reliant on voluntary contributions. The route from a submitted draft to a published paper is a time-consuming trajectory that requires considerable work from authors, editors and referees. The result can be very satisfactory, and the feeling of seeing your own paper in print is almost indescribable.

The difference between a peer-reviewed and other “journals” is the review process: submitted drafts are not simply edited and sent to print, but are anonymously scrutinised first by external experts, revised by the authors to include suggestions made by the referees and finally accepted or rejected by the editor. Not everyone is prepared to accept rejections or even a critical review, and find that it’s a bridge too far to get a paper published in a peer-reviewed journal. That is a great pity, for these people may certainly have interesting material to present and stories to tell.

With the number of journals and other communication channels continuing to grow it can become increasingly difficult for smaller journals to attract authors and to produce timely publications with sufficient content: even when there is an enthusiastic and hard working editorial board. Fortunately, the number of manuscripts submitted to *Lutra*, albeit still quite small, continues to increase every year. There are numerous parallels to be drawn between *Lutra* and ornithological journals like *Ardea* or the more popular *Limosa*

(both published by the Netherlands Ornithologists’ Union, NOU). There are so many active biologists, amateurs as well as professionals, in the Netherlands that it is quite remarkable that these journals receive so few submissions.

We should be proud that we are able to keep journals like these going in a small country: high quality journals, published by non-profit organisations that are available at very low cost. The obligation to contribute to these journals should be felt by all those who are active in field biology in our country, amateurs and professionals alike. After all, your observations and measurements are of no value (other than your personal pleasure) while the data have not been published. For a proper recognition of changes in population or significant ecological findings, publication is a must! Where would one go to for information if our own journal were to be discontinued?

One important question may be: why should we produce a (high quality) journal in the first place? In the recent past, journals and meetings were the most important means of communication. Whenever one found something special or recorded something interesting, one had to wait for a society meeting to be organised or the journal to be published before a wider audience could be informed. We are lucky to have those journals stocked in our libraries, so that we can read back in time. We can compare our own data with published material and see how the world has changed and what is really new. The meet-

ings however interesting become just memories for the participants after a while, except when the minutes or proceedings were formally published.

It is important to realise that both methods of communication, presentations at meetings and published accounts, trigger debate. “Did you see that right? Did I find that also? Was the method of measuring appropriate?” People respond by publishing their own views and findings, by debating and discussing material at society meetings, and informing each other about what is to be seen in the world around us. Together this contributes to an exchange of ideas and an increase in knowledge.

Recently, there have been dramatic changes in our ways of communication. We speak to each other continuously, we promptly post our recent findings on the internet, or we alert co-workers instantly by phone, skype, e-mail, sms, msn or whatever means are currently available. The journals are generally considered very late when they do “finally publish” the material. Few realise that all the rapid data exchange is not particularly long-lasting. Will your personal web-log be available for consultation in 2034?

Papers published in journals generally have a higher quality than those in any other publication, simply because there is an editor in charge (and a peer review), that guarantees a minimum quality standard. Papers in journals can be found with little effort while reports of projects get easily lost, or may simply be impossible to track down because the publisher has long gone out of business.

Professional biologists are encouraged to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals, probably even more so today than ever in the past. They are also under pressure to publish in so-called *high-ranking* journals (with a high citation index), such as *Nature* or *Science*. Such publications are the fruits of their labour and are often the main criteria for evaluating academic

performance. So what is the position of a peer-reviewed journal such as *Lutra* in this ball game? *Lutra* is not a prestigious journal, it is not particularly high-ranking, but it is taken seriously enough to attract some of the more interesting spin-offs of professional biologists. Perhaps we don't attract the most significant or spectacular new findings, material that stands a fair chance of being published in the ‘upper class’ journals, but by increasing the quality of the journal (helped by the recent change from the Dutch to English language!), the journal will be noted and become acknowledged in international fora. The contribution by Kuijper et al. in the present issue is a fine example of the type of papers that professionals can produce and publish in a journal like *Lutra*. We hope that, over time, *Lutra* will become more and more attractive as a recognised publication platform for Dutch and for foreign professionals. We think that the availability of *Lutra*-papers on the internet, for free, will help to spread these papers in the Netherlands and Belgium and far over their borders.

Amateur biologists are not under any pressure to publish. They enjoy their field work, engage in projects of their own free will, and may at best feel a moral obligation to try and get their work published. For many of them, publishing in *Lutra* is a challenge, something that is relatively hard to achieve. Other journals are easier, perhaps better known among their friends or relatives, and being published in these may be nice enough. Yet, a lot of their work is highly interesting and worthy of publication for future consultation. One example within the present issue is the contribution by Boshamer and Bekker on the occurrence of bats on offshore platforms in the Dutch sector of the North Sea. We are very keen to encourage amateur biologists to summarise their findings or work in a format suitable for publication in *Lutra*. The effective conservation of mammals is aided by knowledge, much of which exists only within our extensive community of amateur biologists. That information needs to be shared to be of any use. Only too often do we hear people responding to papers with expressions

like “I knew that twenty years ago”, or “Didn’t they know that...”, but when you kindly ask: “Did you actually publish that expert knowledge anywhere?” a prolonged silence follows. How could we have known?

A journal such as *Lutra* relies heavily on membership (in our case to the Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals) and subscriptions. Again there are parallels with our ornithological counterparts and societies which similarly have to work hard to maintain their membership. A journal cannot be produced if membership sinks below a certain threshold level. The editors of some journals have observed a decline in subscriptions and have responded by changing their style to a glossier, full colour format with less detailed texts. We feel strongly that this is

not the way forward for *Lutra*. Internet publications are glossy, full colour and less complicated (though often lacking in content or credibility), and a serious journal will lose that battle. To enhance our knowledge of mammals in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe, we need a high quality publication platform like a peer-reviewed journal. Commercial journals (the high-ranking ones) have subscription rates that are up to fifty times higher than a journal like *Lutra*. Yet they also have a general scope and are not specifically focused on scientific mammalian research. To offer a publication platform for our acknowledged community of biologists – professional and amateur – and a constant source of information for that community, now and in the future, journals like *Lutra* should be treasured and supported by all possible means.