

ESA publications history excerpted from:

[The Ecological Society of America: Historical Data and Some Preliminary Analyses](#), by Robert L. Burgess, 1976, pages 16-19. (OCR content may contain small errors.)

THE PUBLICATIONS

The newly formed ESA issued volume one, number 1 of the *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* in March of 1917. This was rapidly followed by a “Handbook” later that same year, also issued as a number of the *Bulletin*. By the mid-1920’s, following a period of sporadic publication, the *Bulletin* had stabilized as a small, quarterly journal that has continued uninterrupted to the present time. For a significant period, it appears that the *Bulletin* is perhaps the only real source of historical information. Yet there are some lapses. While responsibility for some of the early volumes is shrouded by the mists of antiquity, for at least 40 years the *Bulletin* was edited by the secretary of the Society. That individual had to gather material, prepare and edit copy, procure a printer, and handle distribution. Therefore, many volumes, upon careful perusal, bear the stamp of the individual secretary. Continuity in format or content was of minor concern.

Reports of meetings are uneven in quality and length. Committee activity summaries are sporadic at best. New members were presented intermittently, although special (separate and additional issues of the *Bulletin* were used as directories. In 1968, two major changes were instituted. One probably resulted from a long-standing Associate Membership, which entitled the member to receive only the *Bulletin*. Dissatisfaction with the housekeeping function of the *Bulletin* led to the establishment of the *Bulletin* Editor as an elected officer, and responsibility passed from the secretary to this newly created position. Secondly, the rise in environmental awareness spurred a change in format — larger page size, colored cover, and the inclusion of new features. These were typified by short essays on aspects of the science, lists or short sketch reviews of new books, announcements of a wide array of courses, meetings, etc., and the provision for at least some response from the readership.

With Volume 58 (1977), the *Bulletin* will be published six times a year. A large segment of the Society still believes that the *Bulletin* really functions as a “newsletter,” and hence content and style ARE the prerogative of the editor. An equivalent group, however, believes that the *Bulletin* needs more structure, even if minimal. Historical record keeping, for example, may be a necessary and requisite objective for the *Bulletin*, and the editor needs to insure that all Society business and reports are adequately documented. At this point, it does not seem that the two views are mutually exclusive, and interesting content and format should be compatible with needs of the Society.

[History of the journal *Ecology*]

The *Plant World* began publication in 1897, organized and financed by a small, private group, the Plant World Association, and for the next 22 years carried a good share of the ecological publication in the United States. While the thrust of many of the editors and contributors was truly ecological, the journal carried few animal studies. The title, of course, was a discouraging factor. After the birth of the Society in 1915, talk of a journal began almost immediately. Most details, however, are lacking, and we don’t yet know in which direction the plans were leading (Taylor 1938).

In late 1918, Dr. Daniel Trembly MacDougal of the Desert Laboratory of the Carnegie Institute at Tucson offered the *Plant World* to ESA (Moore 1938). In 1919, the Plant World Association consisted of 15 men, nine of whom (W. A. Cannon, J. A. Harris, B. E. Livingston, F. E. Lloyd, E. B. McCallum, D. T. MacDougal, J. B. Overton, F. Shreve, and E. N. Transeau) were charter members of the Ecological Society of America. There were only a few inconsequential stipulations — the editors of

the *Plant World* were to serve on the board of editors of *Ecology* (as the journal was renamed), and the cover of *Ecology* was to carry the phrase “Continuing the *Plant World*” for a period of five years. In fact, this phrase lasted for 35 years, finally discontinued with Volume 36 in 1954.

An exhaustive review of *Ecology* as a journal is not appropriate here. A few generalities, however, may be in order. The first issue, dated January 1920, stated that “The pages...are open to papers of ecological interest from the entire field of biological science.” At some point, as yet undetermined, *Ecology* instituted a policy strongly favoring original research, and with few exceptions, opposing theoretical or review submissions. As a result, many important papers went elsewhere, particularly to the *American Naturalist*, the *Botanical Review*, various kinds of *Proceedings*..., and several symposia. More recently, such items have appeared in two hardcover periodicals, *Advances in Ecological Research*, and the *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*. Both of these are published commercially, and have no direct relation to the Ecological Society of America.

In the spring of 1973, the Board of Editors officially changed policy to include theoretical (particularly mathematical) and review papers. In the three years since, however, it is not evident that the stated policy shift has had an effect on the nature of the journal. First of all, tradition dies slowly, and 40 years of non-acceptance of theoretical papers is hard to overcome. Secondly, except for *outstanding* logical presentations, theoretical papers in ecology do not fair [sic] well in review competition with reports and analyses of original research intended for ESA’s major journals.

Volume 1 also contained a “Notes and Comment” section intended for shorter communications and originally containing some feedback from the readership. While not of the “Letters to the Editor” type, in its early years *Ecology* did provide for some response. The section survived almost unchanged through Volume 41 (1960) when it was renamed “Reports.” The impetus for change came mostly from members who felt that “Notes and Comment” was somehow demeaning for sound scientific papers that were placed in that section solely because they were short (less than four printed pages). As space in the journal became more and more limiting, the “Reports” section, set in smaller type, came under a similar attack, and was last published in 1969 (Volume 50).

Volume 1 also contained the first book reviews, and a review section has been an integral and important part of *Ecology* ever since. Feedback from the readers indicates that the review section is often the first part to be read in each issue, and is probably read in its entirety by a majority of the ESA membership. Reviews in the first 33 volumes (1920—1952) were either written, generated, or solicited by the editors or members of the editorial board. In 1953, a position of Review Editor was formalized, since held by only four men—LaMont C. Cole (1953-55), Robert H. Whittaker (1956-1964), Paul S. Martin (1965-1970), and Robert L. Burgess (1971-present). Commensurate with the expanded interest in ecology beginning in the late 1960’s the number of related books received by ESA has burgeoned. What was originally a very sporadic (and short) list of books received has become an average of two pages in each issue.

Content, editing, and finance are outside the scope of the present paper. However, complete lists of editors, assistants, board members, and business managers are given, with institutional affiliation and dates of service in Aikman and Gates (1952) and Thomas and Stearns (1975).

By 1925, a committee had been established to evaluate long-range needs for publication. The main concern was for publication space, and the issue revolved around an increase in the size of *Ecology* versus the initiation of a second journal. The choice was made, and *Ecological Monographs* began in January of 1931, intended to carry longer papers of a monographic nature. This advent was accompanied by a new class of membership, “Sustaining,” a portion of whose larger dues would go toward support of the new journal, and by the establishment of a relationship with Duke University Press to act as publisher for ESA (Lawrence and Lawrence 1956). The new journal, the sustaining membership class, and the publisher have remained, with minor changes, intact to 1976. The editorial

criteria for *Ecological Monographs* were the same as for *Ecology*, except that length of published papers should be 20 pages or more. With few exceptions, this rule held to 1973, when the limit was lowered to 16 pages. This change was never implemented, however, and the current "Instructions to Authors" perpetuates the 20 page limit. The journal has also remained a quarterly, in contrast to *Ecology* which went to six issues per year (bimonthly) in 1965 (Volume 46). Lists of editors, editorial board members, and business managers appear in Lawrence and Lawrence (1956), while portraits of seven editors of the period are reproduced in Lindsey (1973).

Recently, the Board of Editors of *Ecology* and *Ecological Monographs* has discussed the potential for still additional publication space for the membership and the readership. *Ecology* is almost at a size limit, set partly by postal regulations and partly by the physical unwieldiness of still larger volumes. *Ecological Monographs* continues at about the same size (ca. 450 pages per year) primarily because of a lack of long submitted manuscripts. Coupled to the need for theoretical, mathematical, and other types of outlets, a number of potential new journal titles have been discussed. A *JOURNAL OF APPLIED ECOLOGY* has frequently been suggested. However, that exact title has been in publication for the past 13 years as an official organ of the British Ecological Society. Some see a need for an *ECOLOGICAL REVIEWS*, similar in nature, perhaps to the *BOTANICAL REVIEW*, *BIOLOGICAL REVIEWS*, or the *QUARTERLY REVIEW OF BIOLOGY*. Counter-arguments point to the existence of the two hard-cover series, *ADVANCES IN ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH* and the *ANNUAL REVIEW OF ECOLOGY AND SYSTEMATICS*. A *JOURNAL OF MATHEMATICAL ECOLOGY*, and *ECOLOGICAL MODELING* were also discussed, and both have been pre-empted by international publishers.

At present, if ESA does, in fact, decide to add a third journal, something like *ECOLOGICAL THEORY* (or *THEORETICAL ECOLOGY*) or a *JOURNAL OF ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS* seem to be the most viable concepts. However, in these times of escalating costs, a new journal begun by an existing Society needs to be self-supporting almost from the start. ESA is still uncertain of this possibility, in light of its fiscal resources, and hence has made no decision. The current rejection rate for *Ecology* runs consistently at 70 percent, however, so it is evident that the need is there. Only the future will tell the outcome of these continuing deliberations.

Other expansions include the reformatting of the *Bulletin* (discussed above) and the decision to publish it bimonthly starting in 1977. Also, the *COMMENTARY*, carried in *Ecology* from 1969 through 1976, will move to the *Bulletin* in 1977. Publication of *Ecology* eight, ten, or twelve times a year was also considered, but was deemed editorially impossible with the present volunteer Board of Editors.

Two other items deserve mention. The first paid employee of the Society was a Managing Editor, begun with the appointment of Alton A. Lindsey in 1971. He was succeeded by Crawford G. Jackson, Jr. in 1973. The Managing Editor is responsible for both *Ecology* and *Ecological Monographs* in all respects except acceptance/rejection decisions based on scientific merit of the submitted manuscripts. This function is handled by the Board of Editors. Secondly, a Special Publication Series has been established, and the first volume (Cushing 1976) is now in print. Plans are underway for additional volumes. Quality control and editorial criteria are still implemented by the managing editor and the Board, but publication is through commercial channels and is intended to be *ad hoc* rather than periodic.