

## EDITORIAL



# THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF MASTOZOLOGÍA NEOTROPICAL

*Mastozoología Neotropical will celebrate 25 years of uninterrupted publication in 2018. In preparation for this anniversary, we wish to address several challenges currently facing our journal, identify opportunities on the horizon, and provide our views on the directions it should take. We do so after a brief overview of the current status of Mastozoología Neotropical.*

## THE PRESENT

*The initial aspirations and evolution of our journal are reflected in several editorials published over the years. Among these, Pardiñas & Pereira (2013) provided an overview of the evolution of the journal during its first 20 years, and Bonvicino & Flores (2016) signaled the beginning of the current phase, in which Mastozoología Neotropical is formally co-edited by SAREM (Sociedad Argentina para el Estudio de los Mamíferos) and SBMz (Sociedade Brasileira de Mastozoologia), and they reviewed some of the earlier collaborative efforts that paved the way to this agreement. Currently, Mastozoología Neotropical satisfies all of the primary criteria that characterize an established scientific journal: 1) a clearly defined focus on the study of Neotropical mammals, extant and extinct; 2) an international editorial board of scholars in the field; 3) an established system of peer review by specialists; 4) regular and timely publication (two issues per year); and 5) a standard format for articles and notes that includes title, author affiliations, abstracts in two languages, one of which must be English, full records of the items in the literature cited, etc. In addition, the journal is now published both on paper and online. The online version is open access and produced in pdf format (html versions are currently provided via the Scielo platform).*

*Mastozoología Neotropical received 89 and 88 research manuscripts and published 38 and 40 papers (combining articles and notes) in 2015 and 2016, respectively. As these numbers suggest, the current acceptance rate is about 50%. The affiliations of the first author of these submitted manuscripts represent 17 different countries, including Brazil (30% of the manuscripts), Argentina (24%), Colombia (14%), other Latin American countries (27%), and countries outside the region (5%). Of these submissions, 47% were in English, 42% in Spanish, and 11% in Portuguese. Whereas 95% of the manuscripts came from Latin American countries, 47% of the manuscripts received were in English. Similarly, of the papers published in the biennium (some of which, of course, had been received in 2014), 51% were in Spanish, 45% in English, and 4% in Portuguese.*

*More generally, there is a healthy flow of manuscripts through the different phases of the editorial process. At any point in time, there are some 25-30 manuscripts for which an editorial decision is pending. At the time an issue is completed, about 10 additional accepted manuscripts are carried over to the following one.*

*Of more than 200 articles published between 2011 and 2016, 39% come from Argentina, 19% from Brazil, 12% from Colombia, 21% from other Latin American countries, and 9% from outside Latin America. Spanish-speaking countries account for 73% of published articles, but only 53% of the articles are in Spanish. As mentioned, 19% of the articles come from Brazil,*

but only 4% of the articles are in Portuguese. Overall, English is the language of choice for 43% of the articles, even though only about 9% of the articles come from outside Latin America.

## THE FUTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The publication industry, scientific journals included, is experiencing numerous changes, to the point that it is hard to predict how it will look only a few years from now. It thus seems that we must make decisions in the face of uncertainty; here are some of the considerations and proposals:

1. **Scope of the journal.** We think the journal has a well-defined scope and audience. It arose as an initiative of SAREM but has had research on the mammals of the Neotropics as a focus since its inception, as appropriately reflected in its name. Over the years, there has been a notable increase in the number of submissions and publications from outside Argentina, including Brazil, other Latin American countries and, to a lesser extent, countries outside the Neotropics. Many of the submissions, of course, are multinational. A Neotropical perspective requires that the journal be open to all authors interested in the mammals of the region. We embrace the vision of SAREM and SBMz as they have joined efforts to support and strengthen Mastozoología Neotropical as their primary research journal. This makes more sense to us than the development of individual journals by each society.

The dissemination of research does not depend exclusively on original research papers. Review papers of various lengths and styles offer broader perspectives on the development of the field and highlight some of the relevant literature. Mastozoología Neotropical has included this dimension in the past, with special issues, commentaries, and editorials. Recent issues have hosted Special sections emanating from symposia held at SAREM's annual meetings. We believe our journal should develop an explicit policy in this sense, and our editorial team should be involved in developing this component further.

2. **Other publications and communications.** At the time Mastozoología Neotropical was founded, the journal had also to serve as the primary means of communication to the members of SAREM, although it could be supplemented by notices to members, bulletins, and face-to-face meetings. At this point in time, this function has been superseded completely by the emergence of email, the internet, and social media. To us, this means that many of the communication purposes of the journal could and should be moved to other media that are faster, more flexible, and more effective to these ends. These media should not carry the burden of a scientific journal, and might function faster, in multiple languages, and be essentially cost-free. Of course, this is already happening; we just need to recognize it and push it further. The reciprocal point is that Mastozoología Neotropical no longer needs to do all those other things.
3. **Online-only production of the journal.** Online access to publications is the preferred (and to a growing extent, the only) method for most scientists. A striking example is provided by the journal *Evolution* which, after seven decades of uninterrupted publication for a society of several thousand members, has shifted to online-only publication (the choice of a printed copy does exist, but carries a substantial print-on-demand price tag). Online access provides greater speed, visibility and access at a reduced cost, and journals such as ours can make use of the savings to improve the quality of the online product in terms of graphical design and (electronic) publishing standards, including hidden fields that allow for the automated recognition of article citation data, cross links between in-text citations and cited publications, and links of the latter to external sources. These, of course, are choices to be made,

but the consequences of not making them or delaying them may be costly for the journal's viability. Our recently approved Editorial Norms already include several developments in this direction, such as electronic citation styles, explicit developments for making our online publication taxonomically valid, and explicit statements regarding data reposition and availability standards. As of 2017, all online articles are marked so that they can be automatically indexed, a change invisible to most users, but important in the modern era. Our journal has also recently adopted an online system for handling manuscripts. Additional adjustments and improvements will be required, and we see this as one of the more active areas for the development of the journal.

- 4 **Language.** Research articles are meant for professionals working in the field of Neotropical mammalogy. To us, this means that we should adopt the current lingua franca of science, i.e. English, as the sole language for the journal. As scientific publications of all sorts multiply and the number of articles to consider continues to grow, no researcher can avoid using search tools to sort through the vast literature to identify potentially interesting papers. Visibility is the product of multiple factors, including indexing in commonly used databases and citations. Authors that choose to publish in languages other than English, and journals that follow a similar path, are limiting their own visibility and attractiveness to the international community. The burden of managing a multilingual journal adds to the costs of that path. There are, of course, costs associated with an "English-only" option, including additional time and efforts allocated to manuscripts by non-native speakers. Certainly, aspiring professionals in the field need to come to terms with this reality, and there are ways to alleviate the problem, both before submission and in the refinement of accepted manuscripts.

Language is a sensitive issue for many reasons, including the fact that is close to our individual identity, so it deserves a few additional comments. First, entire sectors of the scientific community have already resolved this issue in favor of the exclusive use of English for research publications. Examples include just about all of the areas of cellular and molecular biology, and whole disciplines such as physics. Because biological diversity is geographically structured, Neotropical mammalogy has a geographical anchor in Latin America. In our view, this introduces a nuance but is not a defining factor. Second, the issue has been resolved in the same general direction in countries such as France, whose sense of pride about their culture and language is beyond reproach. Third, many scientific journals in Brazil have also opted for the English language in recent years. SAREM made a similar choice for its popular book on the biology of caviomorphs (in this particular case, with extended abstracts, figure and table legends provided also in Spanish). Finally, whereas English-only is not a requirement, it figures prominently as a favored characteristic of indexing systems like the Web of Science and many others. We see all these as signs of a trend that is better embraced than resisted.

5. **Dissemination to decision makers and non-scientific audiences.** We are not insensitive to the concern that publishing research in English may alienate decision makers, actors in the field (e.g., park rangers), and the general public. However, we note that navigating through the scientific literature is virtually impossible for non-scientists. Supplemental titles and abstracts (or extended abstracts) in Spanish or Portuguese, can be easily retained or incorporated to alleviate the problem. However, we really think that, just as scientists need devoted venues for publishing their research, other audiences require specialized means of communications, not just papers destined for scientists published in (or translated into) their native tongues. Crude translations may be obtained at no cost in the internet, and scientists in need of communicating with other audiences had better prepare specific materials to that end.

*In closing, we believe that Mastozoología Neotropical is in an excellent position to face the challenges outlined above and increase its role as a major venue for the dissemination of research on Neotropical mammals. Furthermore, we believe that the community of Neotropical mammalogists is at a point of maturity, in terms of the scope and quality of research being produced, that provides us an opportunity to move Mastozoología Neotropical to the next level as a scientific journal. To celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the journal, SAREM and SBMz have agreed to support the publication of a special issue that will consist of a collection of invited perspectives on Neotropical mammalogy. In line with the comments made above, this will be an online-only collection of papers in English that will include additional features made possible by modern electronic publishing. We hope you will join us in supporting this move to increase impact and visibility of Mastozoología Neotropical.*

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