

From The Editor

Source: The Auk, 127(1) : 1-3

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2010.127.1.1>

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The Auk

An International
Journal of Ornithology

Vol. 127 No. 1 January 2010



The Auk 127(1):1–3, 2010
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Printed in USA.

FROM THE EDITOR

It isn't every day that one becomes the editor of a major professional journal. Few are ever given the responsibility, and I view it as an honor to manage an outlet for so much important work. My opportunity to become editor of *The Auk* came exactly 30 years after I first joined the AOU. I hope it's not held against me, but I must admit that the Ecological Society of America, not the AOU, was the first scientific society that I joined. However, the AOU is the society with which I have become most closely associated, and it holds my strongest allegiance. I suspect that my experience is shared by many AOU members.

I have witnessed many changes to *The Auk* in the 30 years that I have been a member, and I'll take this opportunity to give some history, share my perspective on how the journal has evolved over this period, and describe some ongoing changes. If I may be presumptuous, I'll refer to my time with the AOU as the "recent era." Over the 126 years of its history (excluding the current volume), *The Auk* has had 16 editors. Remarkably, the first two (J. A. Allen and Witmer Stone) served for a combined 54 years (42% of *The Auk*'s history), whereas there have been six editors over the past 30 years (John Wiens, Alan Brush, Gary Schnell, Tom Martin, Kimberly Smith, and Spencer Sealy). I find it remarkable that the first three of these managed to publish the same numbers of pages and articles per year, using only snail mail and phone, as are found in more recent volumes that are supported by associate editors and electronic communication. My hat's off to John, Alan, and Gary.

I adhere to the maxim "Always be prepared," and it seemed important, in preparing to take over as Editor-in-Chief (a title that didn't exist at the start of the recent era), to conduct at least a cursory review of the journal's publications to gain a better sense of who we are and how the journal arrived at its present state. For instance, is *The Auk* truly "An International Journal of Ornithology," as is stated on the cover? And, if we are an international journal, from what regions of the world, regardless of authorship, do the papers originate? In my survey, I included only primary research articles and considered changes on an annual basis. During the initial decade of the recent era, *The Auk* averaged 106 research papers per volume (range = 87 to 125), and nearly 80% of research papers reported studies on North American birds (for my purposes,

work conducted north of the U.S.–Mexican border). However, that proportion declined significantly between 1979 and 2008 ($r = -0.534$, $P = 0.002$). In truth, the change was not linear, and an abrupt shift appears to have occurred in the late 1980s (Fig. 1) during Alan Brush's editorship. Perhaps this was somehow tied to the dropping of the *Short Communications* in 1987, but Brush informed me that he actively worked to promote and disseminate the work of non-English speakers. And so have the editors that followed him (pers. comm.). The proportion of papers based on North American birds has dropped to two-thirds (0.667 ± 0.014 , $n = 20$) in the past two decades. Thus, a third of *The Auk*'s research papers now report on work from outside North America, which perhaps supports the journal's claim to international scope.

Where have those additional non-North American papers come from? To answer this question, I combined all papers from outside of the Americas into an "Other" category, which comprised mostly European studies (broadly speaking), followed by work done on Australian and New Guinean, African, and then

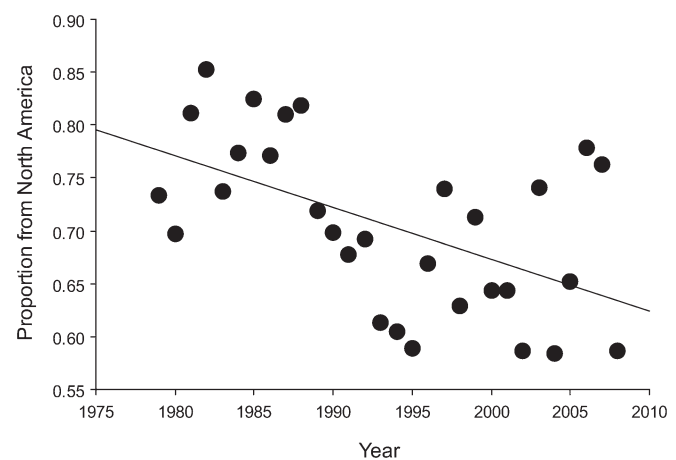


FIG. 1. Variation in the proportion of papers published annually in *The Auk* that are based on the study of birds from North America (i.e., north of the U.S.–Mexican border) between the years 1979 and 2008.

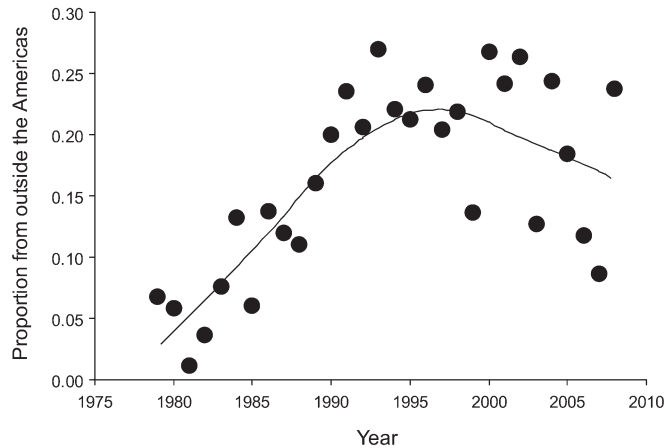


FIG. 2. Variation in the proportion of papers published annually in *The Auk* that are based on research conducted on birds from outside the Americas (North, South, and Central America and the Caribbean) between the years 1979 and 2008.

Japanese and Korean birds. I also combined studies from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America into a "Latin American" group. In the recent era, the proportion of publications from the "Other" group (0.163 ± 0.014) was marginally greater than that from Latin America (0.132 ± 0.008 ; $t_{\text{unequal variances}} = 1.88$, $P = 0.067$). However, studies of species from outside the Americas peaked around 1997 and then declined (Fig. 2). (More on this below.) Publications on species south of the U.S.–Mexican border in the Western Hemisphere did not vary predictably across years, but—and this is an interesting "but"—the proportion of papers on Latin American birds authored solely by individuals located outside the region declined over time ($r = -0.480$, $P = 0.007$). My interpretation is that foreign authors began to work increasingly with local scientists. If so, we should expect to find, and do, that the number of papers written by North Americans working in Latin America and coauthored with Latin American authors increased over time ($r = 0.600$, $P = 0.001$), as did the number of papers published solely by authors from Latin America ($r = 0.463$, $P = 0.010$). These are very positive results, as the growth of ornithology across the Americas is tremendously important. But more progress must be made to increase the proportion of papers in *The Auk* published solely by Latin American authors, because that number remains below 5% annually. Similarly, many of the publications from other regions of the world also have North Americans as coauthors.

Although the number of papers authored by Latin American researchers has increased, can we ascribe this to Kimberly Smith's laudable effort to increase the journal's accessibility to non-English speakers by introducing translated abstracts in 2002? Possibly, but I would question this conclusion because the proportion of papers authored solely by Latin Americans began to increase in the early 1990s, well before the initiation of second-language abstracts. I suspect that the individual efforts of (mainly) North American scientists, the independent growth of ornithology in Latin America, and increased funding opportunities for students from Latin America (e.g., The Chapman Fund of the American Museum of Natural History) are primarily responsible for

increasing the submissions and publications by Latin American authors.

Other aspects of publication history worthy of study surely include changes in the contributions made by the sexes and the waxing and waning of various areas of research, but analyses of these await future study. My perceptions are that the contributions of women have grown steadily over my 30 years of reading *The Auk* and that a higher proportion of the youngest members of our society are more interested in the conservation of birds than in more traditional areas (i.e., systematics, ecology, or physiology) than was true in my graduate school days. Journals are not static entities, and as I see it, two questions for the future are "How does *The Auk* serve the eclectic values of its membership?" and "How does *The Auk* respond adaptively to remain a vital resource for researchers who work on birds?" My challenge, and that of the leadership of the AOU, is to address these issues and continue *The Auk's* long history as the best outlet for avian research.

These are ever-present challenges, which previous editors have attempted to address. We strive to be the best outlet for ornithological research, and one of the most reliable ways to attract the best is to provide rapid and high-quality reviews. To that end, Tom Martin added associate editors during his tenure in the 1990s. He began with only a few, but the number has grown to roughly 30. After Tom's term as editor, Kimberly Smith made the move to electronic submissions through Rapid Review and established *The Auk's* own editorial office with a managing editor and copy editor. Editors have also seen features come and go in the journal as a means to increase the journal's attractiveness. For instance, Martin began "Overviews" in 1999, to which Smith later added "Perspectives in Ornithology" in 2001. My mother was right, appearance matters—and John Wiens changed the journal's physical layout by his introduction of double columns and change to smaller typeface (this increased the number of words without increasing the number of pages). John was also the first to use a computer to run the office. Tom Martin further changed the journal's appearance by adding original cover art in 1998, and Spencer Sealy continued this initiative by moving to the current larger format. Spencer also oversaw the transitions from Rapid Review to ScholarOne, to publication by the University of California Press, and to availability of manuscripts online within days of acceptance as ahead-of-print publications.

The pace of change has been rapid over the past 15 years, and it is unlikely to stop if we wish to continue to meet the changing needs of our readership. For instance, with this volume (but not in this issue) I will begin a new feature, "Rapid Communications," to provide an outlet for authors to publish brief articles on timely material in the shortest time possible. Authors must receive approval from the editor before submitting a manuscript for rapid communication. If approved, the manuscript will be put on a fast track for review, and if accepted, it will be printed within just a month or two of submission. We have also initiated the process to begin publishing audio and video media as supplementary materials in research papers. Beginning in 2010, authors will be able to submit audio and visual formats that will be available to online readers and stored permanently by University of California Press. Research has come to rely on high-quality media, made accessible by new technology, for studying the elaborate social behaviors and vocalizations that make birds such a rich avenue for research.

The journal's ability to include an audio or video record of, for example, elaborate mating displays or song, in a research paper will greatly enhance scientific communication. Other possibilities being considered include podcast interviews with authors of highlighted articles to allow greater insights into the authors' work and ideas.

Discussions about a name change for *The Auk* have swirled about for many years. The tradition and historical value of the name are not insignificant, but in my opinion they are outweighed by the need for better communication of the importance of our journal to people outside ornithology. Moreover, we need to acknowledge that authors base their decisions on where to submit manuscripts at least partly on the recognition value of a journal's name. I wonder to what extent the decline in publications from scientists outside the Americas that began around 1996 to 1997 (Fig. 2) was the result of the name change of *Ornis Scandinavica* in 1994 to *The Journal of Avian Biology*? But a name change for *The Auk* may be a moot point if current discussions among the eight member societies of The Ornithological Societies of North America result in reorganization that yields streamlined, more topically oriented journals. Generally speaking, younger biologists appear to identify less with a specific taxon than with a particular area of

research, and it seems that a change in journal "packaging" could help attract and retain new generations of ornithologists.

I've been on the job for just under half a year, and my experiences have so far been eye-opening, challenging, at times frustrating, yet always rewarding. My respect for the editors who preceded me has grown, and I can only hope to earn the same respect from my successors. My charge, which I will steadfastly pursue, is to continue to publish the best journal possible. Success in that endeavor will be realized, however, only through the participation and contributions of the full membership. The volunteer effort of the associate editors is the backbone of the journal, but nothing happens without timely and thoughtful input from reviewers. I encourage everyone to assist the associate editors by accepting requests to review papers and giving your best efforts to provide constructive but critical evaluation, because without the authors *and* reviewers, we cannot have a journal that will continue to meet the growing demands of our science.

Acknowledgments.—I thank Rebecca Holberton, Chair of the Publications Committee, and former editors Alan Brush, Kimberly Smith, and Spencer Sealy for comments on an earlier draft. I take full responsibility for any omissions, errors, or misinterpretations.