

2018

Publishing in Ethnobiology Letters in 2018

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Publishing in *Ethnobiology Letters* in 2018

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Ethnobiology Letters was launched in 2010 with the goal of providing a free-to-publish, open-access, online venue for short peer-reviewed articles in ethnobiology (Wolverton et al. 2010). Over the course of nine volumes, which comprise 12 issues, published since that date, *Ethnobiology Letters* has grown and changed, with new editors, authors, and submission categories. We write this editorial to highlight those changes, as well as to report submission and review metrics for the journal since the inception of our online journal management system. We describe the current status of *Ethnobiology Letters* and plans for the future of the journal.

Changes to *Ethnobiology Letters* Since 2010

Origins and Aims of the Journal

The scope of *Ethnobiology Letters* (abbreviated henceforth *EBL*), as laid out by the original editors Steve Wolverton, Cissy Fowler, and David Cozzo in their 2010 introductory letter, is “a peer-reviewed journal for short papers on topics related to ‘the study of human and plant and animal interactions’” (Wolverton et al. 2010:1), which is to say the entire field of ethnobiology. The journal is sponsored by the Society of Ethnobiology, which created *EBL* following the annual board meeting in 2010 to address several identified needs: 1) a publication venue for important data and research that do not fit the mission of the *Journal of Ethnobiology* to “publish full-length, problem oriented articles” (Wolverton et al. 2010:1); 2) a publication venue for short papers in ethnobiology, defined here as papers less than 5,000 words, and especially less than 3,000 words, in length; 3) a forum for rapid publication and dissemination of research without being constrained by semi-annual or quarterly print publication schedules; and 4) a new home for book reviews that previously resided in the *Journal of Ethnobiology* where the number of pages and research articles that could be published is limited. An additional goal of *EBL* that endures today is to

provide a completely free publication venue for scholars: there is no cost to submit or publish an article, and all articles published are available free of charge through an open-access online platform and Creative Commons license. In a world where both reputable publishers and “predatory journals” (Beall’s List 2018; Bohannon 2013) seek often significant Article Processing Charges (APC) to enable open access to published articles, whether or not actually peer reviewed, *EBL* maintains a rigorous single-blind peer review process and a free-to-publish venue for disseminating ethnobiological research with no barrier to publication for authors regardless of institutional or personal financial resources.

Submission Categories

Since 2010, the editors have periodically assessed and restructured *EBL*’s submission categories to take advantage of new opportunities and to expand the scope of the journal to reflect the diversity of scholarly work in ethnobiology. In 2011, we commissioned our first “Featured Reprint” (Driver 2011) together with new scholarly commentary, furthering our mission of making key articles available through open access and facilitating academic dialogue. The following year, Vougioukalou (2012) provided the first contribution to a new, non-peer-reviewed article category (beyond book reviews), “Interviews & Reflections,” which provides a venue for communication with scholars and elders, as well as personal reflections, obituaries, and opinion pieces. Our newest category of peer-reviewed article appeared in 2015 (Armstrong and Veteto 2015) as “Mini-Reviews” (now “Short Topical Reviews”), with the aim of synthesizing the most relevant literature on a narrowly defined topic of significant interest to ethnobiologists. Limited to 1,500 words and 15 cited references, Short Topical Reviews are our most focused publication format and have proved popular in scholarly research and teaching alike.

Special Issues

In 2015, *EBL* also published its first special issue, marking the first time that the journal published multiple issues in a calendar year. Since 2015, three guest-edited special issues have appeared, focusing on themes as varied as Digital Zooarchaeology (McKechnie et al. 2015), Memoirs and Memory (Stepp 2016), and Ethics in Ethnobiology (Fowler and Herron 2018). Special issues have arisen from sessions at the annual conference of the Society of Ethnobiology, as well as other collaborations and working groups, and the editors of *EBL* are always willing to discuss potential special issue projects with interested guest editors. In order to balance the workload of our staff, and serve the greater needs of our readers and authors, we currently limit *EBL* to only one special issue per calendar year.

Reviews

Termed “Book Reviews” until 2016, now “Reviews,” *EBL* now accepts reviews of multiple categories of media, including films, exhibits, and other forms of academic presentation. Reviews are written by all levels of contributors and types of ethnobiologists; we have found that students working on post-graduate degrees take the opportunity to write a Review as they are early in their scholarly career. These reviews include also a special series, initiated in 2015, that acknowledges the work of one of our most prolific book review authors, Eugene Anderson. Anderson authored the first review to appear in *EBL* (Anderson 2010) and has contributed 19 reviews published in *EBL* to date. We have highlighted these reviews through the special section “Reviews: Perspectives from Gene Anderson’s Bookshelf” since 2015.

Ethics and Copyright

In 2012, *EBL* introduced a “Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement” (Ethnobiology Letters 2018a), which lays out the responsibilities of authors, reviewers, and editors to ensure that ethical standards are properly handled throughout the publication process (Welch 2012). This policy requires the disclosure, by all parties involved, of any conflicts of interest, and simultaneously requires and protects the originality of work submitted by authors. Authors are required to submit an “Ethics Declaration” (Ethnobiology Letters 2018b) alongside every manuscript submission that certifies 1) the originality of the work submitted, 2) that all authors are responsible for its content, 3) that ethical standards to

protect research participants’ rights have been followed, 4) that all required institutional and governmental permissions have been received. On the Declaration form, authors declare potential conflicts of interest, including sources of funding and formal permissions; this information has also been included in the endnotes of all articles published beginning in 2012. The editorial board of *EBL* follows best practices in publication ethics by adhering to the “core practices” (formerly the “code of conduct for journal editors”) of COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE 2018). With guidance from COPE, we address issues including allegations of academic misconduct, authorship disputes, and conflicts of interest when related questions come before the editorial team.

While *EBL* has been an open-access journal since its inception, originally copyright of all articles was retained by the Society of Ethnobiology, in keeping with standard journal practices and the policy of the *Journal of Ethnobiology*. In 2015, however, the editorial board made the decision to assign the author copyright for articles published in 2016 and beyond, and then began to publish articles under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Public License (CC BY-NC 4.0; Creative Commons 2018), “which permits others to use, distribute, and reproduce the work non-commercially, provided the work’s authorship and initial publication in this journal are properly cited” (Ethnobiology Letters 2018c). Simultaneous with this change, *EBL* and the Society of Ethnobiology used their copyright authority for all articles published between 2010–2015 to apply the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Public License to those works. As a result, authors are granted a non-exclusive license to reuse and repost their work in a non-commercial setting, provided that they properly cite the original publication of the article in *EBL*. Adopting a Creative Commons license has brought *EBL* in line with other leading open-access journals and expanded the rights of authors while ensuring open access to *EBL* articles in perpetuity.

Submissions to *EBL* 2014–2018

At this point, nearly one decade into the publication of *EBL*, we have taken the opportunity to review our submission statistics, year by year, to track the growth of the journal and how well *EBL* serves its mission to publish shorter format scholarly research in ethnobiology. The metrics below reflect submissions

to the journal since January 1, 2014 (Table 1); in mid-2013 we adopted the Open Journal Systems (OJS) online journal management platform, which provides a full record of all manuscripts submitted to the journal, but only from that date forward. To adjust for the missing half year of 2013, we present here results only from January 1, 2014 through September 19, 2018, when these data were compiled. Articles are categorized by the year in which they were submitted, regardless of when a final decision was made on the manuscript, which in some cases occurred in a subsequent calendar year.

Several trends are evident in these data. First, overall growth in the number of submissions mirrors a similar trend in the increased number of articles accepted for publication. Overall acceptance rates for articles deemed eligible for peer review by the editors, however, have remained consistently above 75% despite the growth in submissions (Figure 1). We believe this is due to two factors: 1) our stringent initial editorial review, which consistently removes 1/3 to 1/2 of all submissions as inappropriate for the journal or of insufficient quality to allow peer review, and 2) our open-access, online format that enables us to publish the full range of ethnobiological research without space constraints. Our editorial philosophy is to encourage submissions that highlight the full global diversity of ethnobiological research, rather than focusing only on “high-impact” or “high-profile” research. *EBL* serves the ethnobiological community and publishes sound ethnobiological research, as recognized through peer review, that fits the scope of the journal.

EBL has maintained a similar structure for the editorial team of three co-editors, a reviews editor, and two editorial assistants since its inception, excepting periods of turnover. The Society of Ethnobiology has generously supported the costs of the journal (web maintenance and editorial assistant

salaries) since its inception and matched the growth of *EBL* with increased funding. Future growth of the journal, however, may be limited by both financial limits and time constraints on editors, which may affect acceptance rates. For the time being, however, the editorial team remains focused on publishing all sound short-format submissions in any area of ethnobiology.

Recommendations for Authors

Given that the majority of articles submitted to *EBL* not published in the journal are initially declined by an editor without peer review, we would like to clarify the primary reasons that we reject article submissions at that early stage. The most common reasons for summary rejection (in no particular order) are: quality of English, relevance of the research question/scope of study, and lack of fit. As a free-to-publish, open-access journal we attract many submissions from international authors for whom English is not their first language. We welcome international contributions, and work with authors to copy-edit final accepted manuscripts, but we do require that submissions adhere to the conventions of academic written English needed to permit effective peer review. We encourage our international authors to work with native or highly proficient English-language speakers to improve manuscripts prior to initial submission, including but not limited to the manuscript editors listed on the Society of Ethnobiology website (ethnobiology.org/publications/manuscript-editing).

A greater challenge, for both native and non-native English speakers, is designing research around a clear central question or scope of study. *EBL* does not simply publish data, but research: data acquired with clear goals that speaks to broader questions of inquiry sought by the range of disciplines that conduct ethnobiological research. Peer-reviewed articles successfully published in *EBL* articulate with a

Table 1 Submissions to peer-reviewed sections of *EBL* (excludes submissions to non-peer-reviewed sections: Editorials, Reviews, Interviews & Reflections; also excludes mistaken/duplicate submissions), including special issues, between January 1, 2014 and September 19, 2018. Note that many 2018 submissions were still in peer review at the time these statistics were compiled, so the number of peer-reviewed submissions accepted will almost certainly increase.

Year of submission	Number submitted	Of which peer reviewed	Of which accepted
2014	30	20	15
2015	39	26	21
2016	46	23	20
2017	59	40	31
2018	36	20	6

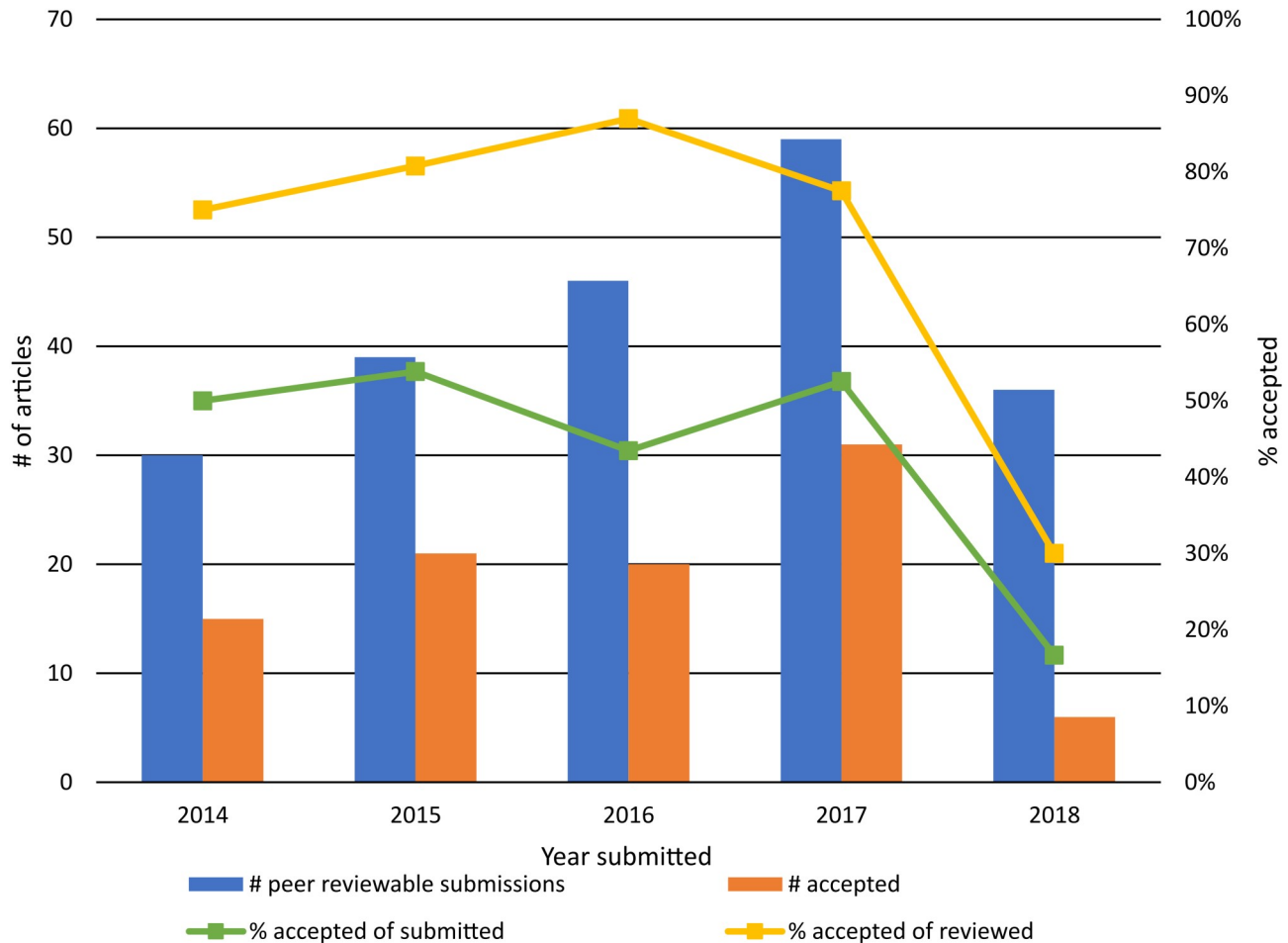


Figure 1 Change over time in number of peer-reviewable articles submitted to and published in *EBL*, with acceptance rates (of all submitted articles, and of those deemed eligible for peer review by editors) expressed as percentages. Note that many 2018 submissions were still in peer review at the time these statistics were compiled, so the acceptance rates reflected above for that year are artificially low and will almost certainly rise. Figure reflects data in Table 1.

relevant published literature and are written clearly around a central focal topic or question. Submissions that present ethnobiological data without sufficient context are commonly rejected by editors without peer review. We do not typically publish articles focused on the pharmacological activity of plants unless these are clearly embedded in an ethnobiological question or literature; the results of surveys and assays alone do not fall within the scope of the journal.

We additionally reject articles that fail to meet the ethical standards of *EBL*. We do not publish material that has been previously published, in whole or in part, especially when that material is not marked as a direct quotation. Respect for the rights, knowledge,

and practice of the people and communities with whom we conduct research is paramount to the Society of Ethnobiology, and so we do not publish scholarship that lacks appropriate permissions or does not follow ethical standards related to research participants' rights. We acknowledge that such standards vary internationally and work with authors when possible to assuage potential concerns and misunderstandings.

Finally, we occasionally reject articles on the grounds that they do not fit the submission standards for *EBL*. We publish short articles, and some longer pieces may be better suited to the *Journal of Ethnobiology* or to other journals that accept longer text and/or more figures, tables, and references cited. For

example, a manuscript that relies on ten figures to make its argument is unlikely to be a good fit for *EBL*, where we limit Research Communications to a maximum of two figures and three tables.

***EBL* in 2019 and beyond**

The most recent development for *EBL* is our inclusion in JSTOR's new open-access archive (JSTOR 2018). Inclusion in JSTOR's popular academic journal portal boosts the visibility of *EBL* and provides a full mirrored collection of our articles in PDF form. This service is free to the journal and thus offers only additional benefits to authors. While *EBL* articles are hosted only on our website and on JSTOR, our journal is fully indexed and searchable through several leading indexing services: DOAJ (the Directory of Open Access Journals; DOAJ 2018), the Emerging Sources Citation Index of Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics 2018), Scopus (Scopus 2018), and EBSCO Academic Search Premier (EBSCO 2018). As a member of the Emerging Sources Citation Index, we have met the minimum duration of continuous publication necessary to be placed under consideration for an Impact Factor from Web of Science, which we believe will further broaden the visibility and appeal of *EBL*. Notably, our citation score, as rated by SCImago's Journal Rank, has displayed a long-term upward trend, indicating increased attention to *EBL* articles within scholarly publications (SCImago 2018).

Our next planned change to the journal is an upgrade to the new version of the OJS platform, currently in version OJS 3.1 (Public Knowledge Project 2018). The new version of OJS meets modern web standards for use and accessibility, and will significantly improve ease of use for authors and reviewers, as well as our editorial team. We have delayed in upgrading, however, as OJS has still not enabled the "books for review" feature which we rely upon in OJS 2.4, so we will lose important functionality with the upgrade. We are likely, however, to move to OJS 3.1 in 2019 with or without this feature, and will work with the entire *EBL* community to ensure that the transition is a positive one for all users.

The editorial team remains committed to further the scholarly needs of the global ethnobiology community, and we welcome feedback from past, current, and potential future authors and reviewers regarding future directions for *EBL* in 2019 and into the second decade of the journal.

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We thank the past editors (David Cozzo, Cissy Fowler, James Welch, and Steve Wolverton) and editorial assistants (Jonathan Dombrosky, Amy Hoffman, and Amy Pittsenbarger) of *EBL* for building the journal to what it is today.

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