

A new decade and a new editor in chief for *Plant Ecology and Evolution*

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Editor in chief

In the late evening of Thursday March 12th, the Belgian government announced unprecedented measures in the hope to slow down the spread of COVID-19. For Meise Botanic Garden, this meant closing its gates to the public, and the researchers were asked to set up their home office and work remotely.

Similar measures were taken in other European countries and all over the world. The editorial team of *Plant Ecology and Evolution* was understandably affected as well but thanks to the hard work and dedication of everyone involved, the first issue of 2020 was published on time.

Many researchers, including our editors, had to quickly adapt to the new situation by setting up home offices, finding creative ways of doing research, and switching to online teaching. Researchers are usually good at problem-solving and despite the extra workload, their passion for science and knowledge sharing drives them forward. Unfortunately, we do not know how long this unprecedented situation will last nor if it will have significant or long-lasting consequences for our research community.

The corona crisis did not have a major impact on our journal so far, at least not with regard to manuscript submission. The number of submissions to our journal remains stable and we do not observe a decline in the quality of research. It is our hope that the current situation does not impede researchers too much in doing what they do best: performing cutting-edge, relevant research and sharing the outcome with the global community. As a journal, we stand ready to assist authors with publishing and disseminating their state-of-the-art research about plant ecology and evolution.

One major change that has happened for *Plant Ecology and Evolution* – although independently of COVID-19 – is my appointment as the new editor in chief. I am truly honoured to follow in the footsteps of Elmar Robbrecht, who has led the journal since 2010 when it was established as a merger between *Belgian Journal of Botany* and *Systematics and Geography of Plants* (Robbrecht 2010). Under his guidance, the journal has steadily held its place as a respectable outlet for high-quality research in plant ecology, phylogenetics, and systematics. I would like to sincerely thank Elmar for his devotion to the journal and I am very grateful that he will continue to support the journal as honorary editor in chief.



Em. Prof. Dr. Elmar Robbrecht (left) and Dr. Brecht Verstraete (right), respecting social distancing measures at Meise Botanic Garden.

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This year also ushers in a new decade, as we are celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the title *Plant Ecology and Evolution*. To date, over 400 papers have been published, all of which can be read for free through our website (www.plecevo.eu). We have consistently and timely published three issues a year, not least thanks to our production editor Natacha Beau. Our independent journal has gradually gained international appeal over the years, and we now receive submissions from all over the world (e.g., Europe: De Frenne et al., this issue pp. 188–198; Africa: Fleischmann et al., this issue pp. 283–291; South America: Köhler & Majure, this issue pp. 325–333; North America: Friday & Scasta, this issue pp. 292–311). We have seen a doubling of the impact factor compared to the preceding title *Belgian Journal of Botany* and we managed to keep it constant ever since. The publication of taxonomic treatments, regardless of their length, has been a long tradition, although this does not necessarily have a positive influence on the impact factor. Citation of taxonomic papers takes time, and the citation life of such papers lasts decades or even centuries (Bénichou et al. 2018). We also acknowledge the importance of biological conservation and therefore ask authors to include IUCN conservation assessments whenever possible (Robbrecht 2010). Finally, from 2019 onwards, all papers in *Plant Ecology and Evolution* are published as immediate open access papers with a CC BY 4.0 license and authors retain the copyright of their manuscripts (Beau & Robbrecht 2019). We also do not charge any fees, so publishing with us is completely free (Robbrecht & Beau 2013).

In the coming years, it will be important to address the needs of modern researchers who rightfully expect a high-quality peer review process that is done in a timely manner. As a journal, we will evaluate our current editorial routines in order to decide how we can streamline the publication process for authors, reviewers, and editors. Furthermore, we will continue to support open science by open access publishing

but also by investigating how we can improve our policy on FAIR data (Wilkinson et al. 2016).

We are aware that authors currently have a (too) large choice of journals in which to publish their research and that this creates a challenge for *Plant Ecology and Evolution*. Increasing the visibility of the journal will therefore be important. Authors should not only find their way to our journal before submission but their research also deserves to be disseminated widely and reach an international audience after publication. Effective communication is therefore of the utmost importance to enhance the reputation of the journal and to increase the impact for both the journal and the authors. A first step is our Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/plecevo>) where every publication will be featured.

A final aspect that deserves attention is inclusiveness. *Plant Ecology and Evolution* has a strong tradition of publishing research about biodiversity in the tropics and subtropics (e.g., Motato-Vásquez et al., this issue pp. 229–245). We expect authors to conduct their research with the utmost respect for the local biodiversity and we strongly encourage them to include local collaborators. Ultimately, we hope to receive submissions in which researchers from the tropics play a major role, and we particularly welcome submissions by African researchers.

I deliberately use the pronoun “we” in this editorial because running a journal is not a one-man show. We are a small but dedicated team that is supported by excellent associate editors and members of the editorial board. Thanks to the contributions of authors and the invaluable efforts of reviewers, we are able to produce a high-quality journal with international reach.

Prof. Dr. Pierre Meerts (Laboratoire d'Ecologie Végétale et Biogéochimie, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium) has been part of our editorial team ever since *Plant Ecology and Evolution* was launched ten years ago, and he was one of our most active editors. Unfortunately, he recently resigned



Dr. Lorenzo Lazzaro, University of Florence, Italy.



Dr. Petra De Block, Meise Botanic Garden, Belgium.

from his role as associate editor because of a career change. Luckily for us, he has accepted to become a member of our editorial board and his expertise will hence remain available to the team.

Prof. Dr. Federico Selvi (Department of Agriculture, Food, Environment and Forestry, University of Florence, Italy) has been part of our editorial board since 2018 but has now gracefully accepted a more active role as associate editor. We very much welcome his expertise and we are looking forward to working more closely with him.

Dr. Lorenzo Lazzaro (Department of Biology, University of Florence, Italy) joins the editorial team as new associate editor. He is an expert in quantitative plant community ecology with a focus on the ecology and management of plant invasions, especially in Mediterranean insular ecosystems. He is also interested in the interaction between environmental factors and taxonomic, phylogenetic, and functional plant diversity at community level.

Dr. Petra De Block (Meise Botanic Garden, Belgium) is joining our editorial team as editor for the IUCN Red List assessments in taxonomical papers. She is an expert in paleotropical Rubiaceae and is familiar with taxonomy, morphology, and conservation. She has extensive first-hand experience with conservation assessments and is therefore ideally suited for this position.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the entire editorial team for their continued support and commitment to the journal. I am very much looking forward to working with all of them in shaping the future of *Plant Ecology and Evolution* and in ensuring that it is recognized as one of the most important journals in its field.

Finally, I would like to extend a warm invitation to all plant biologists to submit their research to *Plant Ecology and Evolution* for publication and to support the scientific community by taking active part in the review process. *Plant Ecology and Evolution* is truly a journal by researchers for researchers.

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