

## EDITORIAL

# By the Time You Read This...

It is mid-December 2006, and we are in the process of completing issue number 4 of Volume 71. That is, we are working on the issue that will appear midway through 2007; yes, there is a long lead time required to pull an issue of *The Journal of Wildlife Management (JWM)* together. Between now, when we are writing this editorial, and when you read this, The Wildlife Society (TWS) officers will have decided who the editor for Volume 72 will be. Morrison stayed on an extra year (sorry about that) to help with the transition into the merged *Journal of Wildlife Management-Wildlife Society Bulletin (JWM-WSB)* that you are now reading, and Block joined as co-Editor to help Morrison manage the increased work load. As we are writing this editorial, the new, merged journal is running smoothly. All manuscripts are being processed quickly, the journal is coming out on time, and we are personally pleased with the revised format. Naturally, the system is functioning well because of our editorial staff; they are simply outstanding thanks to the continued leadership of Carly Johnson. The staff at Alliance Communications Group (ACG)-who manage the publishing process-is extremely professional. So the state of your journal is very good.

The only outstanding problem with the *Journal* as we write this editorial is the backlog of accepted but unpublished papers. The issue of the backlog has been explained in previous editorials. Briefly, we were unable to keep up with the rate of acceptance during the past several years because of factors unrelated to your current editorial staff. The Wildlife Society officers and staff are working on a solution to the backlog, with a goal of substantially increasing journal size for a duration sufficient to get papers in print within 6 months of acceptance. But it is only mid-December, and we have no idea how this backlog will be resolved. It is frustrating to all of us associated with publishing the journal, and this editorial is just our way of expressing our knowledge of the problem and that efforts are underway to improve the situation.

### The Review Process: How Decisions Are Made

We doubt seriously that many authors are completely pleased with the experience they encounter during review of a manuscript, even when it is accepted. We have averaged about 50% acceptance rate during the past several years, which is high for most major scientific journals. Nevertheless, that still means about half of the people submitting a manuscript must resubmit elsewhere. Unlike some journals, we try to put all submissions-excluding those that have inappropriate content for *JWM*-through the peer review process. Thus, even manuscripts that are rejected receive the benefit of critical comments from at least 4 individuals; namely, 2 referees, the Associate Editor, and Editor. We

consider this a service to people who have chosen this journal for submission. But we are under no obligation to send any manuscript out for peer review, and we can make a decision based on our own evaluation of your work. It is, however, the tradition of *JWM* to provide the full review process as a service to all authors. It is a shame that many people submitting to *JWM* do not choose to join TWS; ultimately, this lack of support will lead to a reduction in what we can publish (as explained more thoroughly below). It is also a shame that many TWS members, including those who publish in *JWM*, shirk their duties as peer reviewers. The review process could be expedited if more people served as referees when asked and if referees were more timely about submitting reviews.

We do receive comments from authors who do not fully understand the process by which we, as Editors, decide which manuscripts to accept. We hope that the following explanation will inform anyone who is not clear on the steps that are taken to ensure that each submission is treated in a fair manner.

All submissions are first quickly scanned by our editorial assistants to ensure that the content appears appropriate for *JWM* and that the manuscript is in a form that at least resembles our guidelines. Many authors go into considerable detail in submission letters attempting to explain the substantial value of the manuscript we are about to evaluate. There is no reason to do that because we (the Editors) do not read these letters, nor do they influence in any way the decision that is made on acceptability. Your work must stand on its own. Cover letters are read by *JWM* staff and only need to state that you are submitting your manuscript exclusively to *JWM* and that no portion of your manuscript has been published elsewhere.

The staff then assigns the manuscript to an appropriate Associate Editor and starts the process of selecting 2 referees. Referees are selected from our database of individuals who have either reviewed manuscripts for us previously (we recently merged the databases of *JWM* and *WSB*) or who have registered as a potential referee on our AllenTrack manuscript processing website. Selection of a referee is made by a keyword search of areas of expertise. Associate Editors are asked to recommend referees when necessary. Frequently we contact 6-8 people before 2 agree to review to serve as referees. We seldom use recommendations for referees made by authors (in your submission letters) because this is designed to be an independent process. Likewise, we seldom reject a potential referee because an author asks us not to send their work to a particular individual. We might send your manuscript to a third referee if you try to direct us away from someone, but

DOI: 10.2193/2006-553

we are trying to make the review process independent of the (understandably) built-in biases of an author.

Here is a key point in how decisions on acceptability are made: your Associate Editor (AE) *evaluates the comments* of each referee. The AE does not tally votes from the referees on acceptability. Rather, the AE uses comments from referees to help highlight issues with the manuscript that the AE might have missed in her or his review of the manuscript, to supplement the AE's own comments, and to get a sense of how substantial a contribution to the wildlife literature the referee thinks the manuscript might make. The AE then makes a recommendation to one of the Editors on acceptability of the manuscript; we then make the decision on acceptance (or most likely the nature of the revision). The central point here to recognize is this: referees provide advice, Associate Editors synthesize and make recommendations, and an Editor decides. A major role performed by us, as Editors, is to ensure that each manuscript receives equal treatment throughout the review process. All of our Associate Editors are fine scientists, but each has his or her own perspective on what constitutes acceptable work for *JWM*. We try our best to balance our decisions.

Manuscripts are sometimes—we do not have the figures on this—returned to one or more referees for reevaluation of a revision. We usually send the manuscript back to the same referees who saw the first version, but sometimes we select a new referee. We do this for many reasons, including the initial referee might not be available to read a new version, the initial referee might not have provided a thorough review, or we might just want additional input. Several authors have complained that they were not treated fairly because we did not pursue the initial referees to review their revision. Please understand that we, as Editors, are under no obligation to even send your manuscript out for review. Our goal is to receive the best input possible. And, ultimately, your work should be able to stand the test of many different individuals.

The basis for a decision on acceptability is, of course, based on many factors. Unlike many journals, our acceptance rate is not driven by our budget. Rather, the budget for *JWM* was driven by our historical rate of receipt of manuscripts and historical acceptance rate. In recent years *JWM* received 350-400 submissions per year; *WSB* received about the same number. Now that we merged the 2 journals, we anticipate a submission rate of  $\geq 700$  manuscripts per year. Thus, we anticipate accepting  $> 300$  manuscripts per year based on historical numbers.

But we do have a budget, and we thus have limits to what we can publish. The Wildlife Society requires page charges from authors because we must pay for the journal. Membership fees to TWS do not cover the costs of publishing the journal. And not all authors are members of **TWS** and are thus not even supporting the society (this plays **no** role in acceptance—we do not even check for membership status—but it does play a substantial role if a reduction in page charge fees is requested). The charges you are asked to pay cover about one-half of the actual cost of publishing your work. Thus, all papers are subsidized by

TWS. Do not get us wrong here; TWS does profit from publishing *JWM*, and that profit is a major factor in running the overall society. But again, TWS built our budget around historical rates of publishing papers. It is up to members of TWS to express to elected society officials how you wish to see money allocated; guess you should have attended that membership meeting at the last conference after all!

We try to publish all good science that has potential management applications. Determining what constitutes "good science" is based on the review process outlined above. We also factor in how unique the work is, such that a manuscript of lower quality relative to some other submissions will gain acceptance given it meets acceptable minimum standards of design, sample size, and analysis. Also realize that we do not have the luxury of looking at, say, 300 submissions at once and simultaneously evaluating the relative merit of each. Rather, we take them as we receive them, so quality will vary across time. But here again, given that we do not have a budget-driven page limit, a manuscript of relatively higher quality will not be rejected because we ran out of space.

An author is always able to request reevaluation of a rejected manuscript. There is no authority above the Editors who will overrule our decision; this is because TWS officers wisely choose to stay out of the editorial process (and TWS staff has no role in journal editorial policy, although they certainly function as key players in seeing the journal to publication). Please feel free to complain to an elected TWS official if you do not like the editorial process or how you were treated by an Editor; but do not ask them to overrule our decision (because they will not). If enough of you complain, then perhaps we can get fired!

## In This Issue

We are constantly amazed by the variety of papers that we are able to publish. In this issue we offer research papers on rattlesnakes, wild turkey, bats, elk, bear, pronghorn, muskoxen, feral cats, and—of course—deer. We are also seeing an increase in the number of submissions from non-United States locations, including in this issue a paper from France on woodcock, from Newfoundland on caribou, and from Italy on ibex. Techniques papers include several on telemetry, an offering on satellite telemetry, and several on amphibian sampling.

Perhaps the most amazing—and to us gratifying—paper in this issue is by the brother team of Mitch and Matt Weegman. I urge you to read their article regardless of your interest in the topic per se. The Weegman paper was peer reviewed in our standard fashion, including very thorough reviews by several experts in contaminants. Oh, did we fail to mention that the brothers Weegman attend Winona Senior High School in Winona, Minnesota, USA. Nice way to start a resume!

## Model Selection versus Hypothesis Testing: Whatever

On virtually a daily basis we are confronted with decisions to make on manuscripts that used either a model-selection,

hypothesis-testing, or mixture of model-selection and hypothesis-testing approach. Many referees view one approach or the other as preferred and recommend rejection of manuscripts that do not follow a certain analytical methodology. And we continue to see papers being published on why the hypothesis-testing approach is fundamentally flawed and others on why the model-selection approach is being applied in inappropriate manners. Our goal here is not to add fuel to this ongoing fire or to necessarily pick one over the other. Rather, we want to point out that the analytical approach used in a manuscript is not the fundamental basis for any accept-reject decisions. Our decisions are based on the answer to this question: Does the work present any meaningful insights into the biology of the system being studied? Testing the null hypothesis of "nonrandom habitat use" is as useless as running all possible combinations of model parameters in evaluating the biology of a system. What we, as Editors of *JWM*, want to know is, What have you discovered about the biology of the system and how do you translate that knowledge into specific management recommendations? Providing the best and most parsimonious model is of limited use if it does not lead to specific management implications. Likewise, lots of tables full of *P*-values do little if they do not relate to biology and management of the system under study. Thus, issues such as effect size or the magnitude of the differences observed have real meaning. Often, we can best view your results through graphs and confidence intervals. Our message: design a solid study, gather a justifiable sample size, describe

the biology, and then follow with the statistics in a supporting, not a lead, role.

### **Membership Reminder**

As we do in every issue, we remind you to please become a member of The Wildlife Society if you are not already. Many authors of papers in *jWM* are not members. If we are to continue to publish a high-quality journal, we need a strong and active membership. There are many ways you can contribute as a member: publish in the journal, serve as a reviewer or Associate Editor, or be active as a member or officer in your local Chapter or Section. **If** you mentor undergraduate or graduate students, encourage them to join. No matter how you are involved, just be involved and be a member.

### **Thanks**

Our staff is led by Carly Johnson with capable assistance provided by Anna Knipps, Dawn Hanseder, Angela Hallock, and Kathryn Socie. These folks do the bulk of the work and are largely responsible for keeping the editorial process moving forward. Things would be a mess without them. We also want to recognize the staff of ACG for moving papers through copyediting, composition, printing, binding, and to you. Production of *jWM* is on schedule thanks to ACG.

-Michael L. Morrison and William M. Block  
*Editors-in-Chief*