

## EDITORIAL

# Getting It Right

Manuscripts contain a vast amount of information. Some of this information summarizes the state-of-knowledge and sets the stage for the paper. Other information presents data and summarizes analysis. Lastly, results are interpreted in the form of a discussion and management implications. Although a number of checks in the review and editorial processes catch errors before publication, the reality is that mistakes happen and make it to print. By mistakes, we do not necessarily mean publications that you disagree with for one reason or another (e.g., topic, analysis, conclusions). What we do mean are annoying problems that detract from the main point of the paper. They happen for a number of reasons; they can be intentional or sloppy oversights. Most are fairly minor in nature, but others can affect the credibility of the paper, the credibility of the authors, and, if prevalent, the credibility of the *Journal*.

We think that, for the most part, peer reviewers, Associate Editors, Editors, and journal staff are very diligent; they simply cannot find all problems with a paper. Thankfully, they find most. We, as Editors, periodically receive correspondence from readers pointing out mistakes in manuscripts and chastising us for allowing them to happen. Indeed, we acknowledge that no manuscript is perfect and that some are less perfect than others. But the review and editorial process does a pretty good job at picking up and correcting most problems. During the past several years there have been widely publicized cases of fraud in which scientists have published articles based on bogus data in some of the world's leading journals. Additionally, we have seen several recent cases in which articles were withdrawn from leading journals because the interpretation of data was based on faulty computer software. What these cases tell us is that the publishing system, although not perfect, does catch the offenders (whether the offense is purposeful or accidental). **If** a scientific paper contains information that has meaning to enough people, then that research will be repeated. Confirmation of results is a hallmark of scientific inquiry. The system works.

We want to use this space to highlight recurring errors in manuscripts, the annoying errors that, with careful and responsible preparation, authors can address before they become problems.

Citing articles is an error we frequently find in publications. We do not mean so much the failure to cite a specific article, which is a problem in itself, but we mean citing a paper or book incorrectly. Indeed, many of us have read a paper in our field of interest and have seen one of our papers cited only to find that it was cited incorrectly. This can occur when a paper is cited out of context or a paper is

cited erroneously. Here is a fictitious example of a paper cited out of context. "The distributions of the western and Gilbert skinks extend eastwards to the Rocky Mountains (Morrison and Block 1931)." Morrison and Block (1931), of course, was the monograph "Distribution of Lizards in Western North America" published in some obscure outlet not readily accessible to anybody. Unfortunately, this fine piece of work, as fictitious as it is, presents no information on skinks. Is it possible that the authors never even looked at this monograph but cited it because the title seemed appropriate? Likely! The other error we find in citations is to do so incorrectly. Here is an example, again based on a fictitious paper. "Block and Morrison (1952) reported that the eastern spotted owl is a bird of the open plains and needs only fence posts for perch sites." However, Block and Morrison (1952) presented data on habitat relationships of perch sites and one happened to include a fence post. Block and Morrison (1952) regarded the use of the fence post as an anomaly. When the authors referenced Block and Morrison (1952) they overstated Block and Morrison (1952) to the extent to make their statement blatantly wrong. As much as the authors needed to cite a paper to support their point, they needed to be completely sure that Block and Morrison (1952) was the one to cite.

Reporting data and summaries of data are other places where authors are responsible for accuracy. Few papers published in this journal are data-free. The foundation of most papers is the quality of their data and how those data are reported. Often, reports are in the form of tables or figures that include estimates of summary statistics, graphs of statistical relationships, or summaries of model parameters and model-selection procedures. We see at least 2 types of mistakes here. One is transcription errors typically resulting from typographical errors. The other is more problematic and is from authors falsifying data to support their thesis. By and large, transcription errors are most common. Many are identified and corrected during review and editing; some simply slip through the cracks. Falsifying data is an ethical issue that goes well beyond this journal and The Wildlife Society; it is an issue that has surfaced in some of the most prestigious scientific journals. We would like to think that this rarely happens in *Journal Of Wildlife Management*. We have a great deal of confidence and trust in reviewers and Associate Editors to identify relationships and conclusions that make little sense and to report them early in the review process. But, there is simply no way that the review process per se can catch falsified data. As noted above, replication of scientific study is a primary manner in which results are verified.

Some of the problems we discuss above can be corrected with review before papers are submitted to the *Journal*. We

rarely receive single-authored papers, so all authors have the responsibility to carefully review their papers. If all authors have not critically reviewed the paper, we question the validity of their authorship. We also strongly recommend that authors have their manuscript peer-reviewed prior to submitting them. It is obvious to us that this step is avoided in many cases. Presubmission peer review provides more opportunities to identify and correct mistakes earlier in the process.

The bottom line is that accuracy of the papers we publish is the responsibility of the authors. The "buck" does not stop with the Editors or officials of The Wildlife Society; rather, it stops with the lead author of any paper. The lead author needs to be sure that papers they cite and all personal communications are reported correctly and without exaggeration. They must carefully proof their papers and catch and remove all typographical errors as best they can. And, above all, they must adhere to the ethical expectations of this journal, The Wildlife Society, and the greater international scientific community to report the truth.

### **In This Issue**

The transition to the new *Journal* continues to be more apparent. In this issue, we have 13 technique articles, 2 human dimensions papers, and 2 conservation and management articles. We regret inclusion of no student voices because none have been submitted. This is a great opportunity for students to contribute to the profession.

Students take the initiative. Student advisors encourage your students to act as professionals! There are also opportunities for Letter to the Editor submissions; we have had few people contact us about opportunities for such articles. Regardless of missed opportunities, we are very pleased with the diversity of topics presented in this issue. As we have seen in past issues, the variety of taxa included in papers is impressive, ranging from salamanders to elephants. Topics range from bread-and-butter habitat and population studies, to an intriguing paper on human perspectives on biological diversity. We are sure this paper will evoke some provocative conversation.

### **Thanks to the *Journal Of Wildlife Management* Staff**

Publication of the *Journal* would be impossible without contributions of numerous people: authors, reviewers, Associate Editors, and, of course, the editorial staff. Our staff is led by Carly Johnson with capable assistance provided by Angela Hallock, Dawn Hanseder, Anna Knipps, and Kathryn Socie. We also want to recognize the staff of the Alliance Communications Group (ACG) for moving papers through copy editing, composition, printing, binding, and to you.

-William M. Block  
*Co-Editor-in-Chief*