



Letter from the new Editor-in-Chief - Linking global priorities: biodiversity and scientific equity

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In 2015, *Neotropical Biodiversity* began offering an invaluable publishing opportunity to authors specializing on the outstanding biological diversity we see today in the American tropics and the Caribbean [1]. By providing a space where top-quality research could be freely published and accessed by scientists around the world, our journal took a strong stand on creating equitable opportunities in the scientific community while advancing biodiversity knowledge [1].

In today's publishing world, removing all economic barriers is an admirable accomplishment. Our message is loud and clear: Neotropical biodiversity matters, access to top-quality research matters, equitable scientific opportunity matters.

There is not a better time or opportunity like this moment in our history. Given the alarming biodiversity crisis in the tropics, paving the way for global open access high-quality research is more important than ever. At the same time, I honor to almost a point of reverence the issue of equity in scientific opportunity as a touchstone in our democracy. Especially, fair opportunity for scientist women and youth.

Open access top-quality research can and will accelerate our basic understanding of the past, current state, and future of biodiversity. The Neotropics is one of the most complex and diverse regions on the planet, yet our understanding of its biodiversity remains limited. This lack of knowledge hampers our ability either to estimate the magnitude of species loss, to understand the ecological complexes in which they occur, or to prevent further losses. The effects of biodiversity loss operate on a global scale. Addressing current biodiversity problems should require full international effort, with scientific input from around the world, but especially from high biodiversity regions that are so important for global processes.

Our journal's values of scientific excellence and equity lie at the core of such pursuit. We cannot put boundaries on top-quality research, or on where this research should be deployed. But a global goal of equal representation is still a long way off. Even in the era of open access and free publishing, most high-impact publications in international journals come from developed countries. Tropical America and the Caribbean, despite being a hub of biodiversity, remain underrepresented. Especially women. There is not a lack of high-quality research by men and women in these regions, but the amounts of data that are collected, analyzed, and eventually archived without being published are staggering.

I then ask, how can we use this opportunity to ensure that top-quality research by regional scientists, in particular by talented women, reaches international journals? Optimizing participation and inclusion of different groups and regions requires understanding of how any disparities in scientific productivity arise.

This is the deal. Developed countries are able to invest more resources in science. This leads to regional inequity of scientific opportunity and research agendas, and naturally, to disparities in high-quality contributions in international journals. Still, policymakers and public academic institutions of developing regions recognize the link between scientific productivity and development, and encourage high-quality research. The value of publishing this research in international journals, however, is less obvious to them. The current agenda does not adequately encourage and support scientists to remain productive at the stages of publishing. Heavy workload (leaving little time for writing manuscripts), and lack of an academic environment that progressively builds the skills and self-confidence to convert data into a publishable manuscript are daunting realities. For women in these regions, these barriers are further exacerbated by pronounced gender biases favoring men in science.

The advantage of an academic trajectory in developed countries is enormous. The insightful words of our outgoing Editor-in-Chief, Yntze van der Hoek [2], resonate with me. The truth is, we have been privileged. My academic roots in Canadian universities ensured an academic culture that, not only encouraged and celebrated high-impact publications but also fostered gender equality in research opportunities. Still, I am fully aware that gender bias still exists in developed countries – hence, the poor representation of women as senior and corresponding authors in publications in top journals, in academic leadership positions, and on journal editorial boards. Even so, I was lucky to have mentors and peers that empowered me to build both, the self-confidence to believe in my scientific talent and the skills to publish my work. I have learned that initial mentorship and encouragement are key catalysts for young scientists, women and men alike, to move forward into productive scientific careers.

Other advantages were funding, instant access to the published literature, and time – time to read relevant papers, and time to write a manuscript. Such opportunities exist because policymakers and

academic institutions recognize publications in high-impact journals being an important measure of success in the scientific world, not only are key for institutional prestige but also to solve today's problems. Like van der Hoek [2], I too recognize these were biases in my favor. Personally, I have found this reality dismaying, confusing, and at times unnerving.

As the new Editor-in-Chief of Neotropical Biodiversity, I am humbled and honored for the opportunity to lead an international journal that fosters a publishing culture of inclusion and equity while maintaining the highest standard of scientific quality and rigor. My primary focus shall be on increasing and securing the best authors and papers in the field to ensure our journal continues to achieve scientific excellence and international reputation. I am devoted to increasing top-quality contributions from underrepresented countries in tropical America and the Caribbean. In particular, I want to encourage and empower talented women and students from these countries, to endeavor to go outside of their comfort zones and take every opportunity to publish their work with us, to believe in their scientific talent and just go for it! Once one paper is published, they will have confidence to publish more!

I am sincerely grateful to my predecessor and colleague, Yntze van der Hoek, who has done an outstanding job strengthening the quality and reputation of the journal. He definitely "paid it forward". Founding Editor-in-Chief, Juan Manuel

Guayasamin, has my admiration for his success in creating the foundation of the journal: to be a hub for top-quality research and scientific democracy. I inherit an exceptional team of Advisory and Associate Editors to help me push this foundation forward. Finally, I thank the Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, and Technology of Ecuador (Senescyt) for being the driving force behind our journal's ability to be both, open access and free of article publishing costs [1], and the highly prestigious Taylor & Francis Group, our publisher, for the invaluable editorial support they provide.

We will strive to be a journal that is fair, punctual, transparent, and engaging, while it remains the beacon of scientific quality it has been since its launch.

So, I invite and encourage you, Neotropical biodiversity scientists, to publish your work with us.

References

- [1] Guayasamin JM, Lucio-Paredes A. A new open access journal for publishing research on neotropical biodiversity. *Neotrop Biodivers.* 2015;1(1):1.
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