

A Report by the Editor-in-Chief for *Molecular Biology and Evolution* (MBE), Volume 38

Sudhir Kumar *

Department of Biology, Institute for Genomics and Evolutionary Medicine, Temple University, 1925 N. 12th Street, Philadelphia 19122, PA

*Corresponding author: E-mail: s.kumar@temple.edu.

Molecular Biology and Evolution (MBE) is the flagship journal of the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution and a highly respected journal in the field of evolutionary biology. MBE provides members of the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution with a high-impact outlet for their research and opportunities for active participation in scientific publishing.

MBE's transition from a hybrid publishing model to fully open access publishing was successfully completed at the end of 2020, with the January 2021 issue containing only open access manuscripts. This transition required modifications to the submission and production of manuscripts and the publication fee structure. The changes in publication fees raised concerns about decreased manuscript submission due to increased publication costs for some researchers, but submission rates in 2021 were 4% higher than those in 2020. MBE continues to support the publication of novel and high-impact research regardless of authors' ability to pay publication fees. MBE provided full or partial waivers of publication fees to many authors.

The December issue of Volume 38 also marked MBE's transition to continuous publication. The manual construction and organization of MBE issues by the editorial office was a legacy of print publication. Since Volume 37 closed with our last printed issue, MBE maintained a similar look and feel in its fully online format. With the close of Volume 38, readers may have noticed that new issues appear 'in progress': the issue is 'opened' at the beginning of the month, and manuscripts are continuously added throughout the month as they become available for publication. This change allows manuscripts to appear in an online issue soon after the page proofs are corrected.

During the 2021 calendar year, MBE received 1312 original submissions and 485 revised submissions from authors based in 58 countries. The majority of submissions (94%) came from Europe, Asia, and North America, with the greatest proportion of manuscripts submitted by authors based in Europe (36%). Authors based in Asia submitted 32% of manuscripts received in 2021, while North American researchers submitted 26% of manuscripts.

The bulk of submissions were Articles with smaller quantities of Letters. In 2021, MBE received 15 Brief Communications (used to communicate software and resource updates), 16 Perspectives, 22 Reviews, and 3 Protocols. Manuscript submissions were distributed evenly throughout the year, with a peak of 123 submissions in March and the lowest number of submissions (102) in October.

Of original manuscripts submitted in 2021, 25.7% received decisions offering the opportunity to revise. Handling editors invited external review for 53% of original submissions received. The average time from submission to the decision was 26 days. Rejection prior to external peer-review is meant to save time for authors and reviewers in finding the most suitable venue for a given manuscript. Of the 47% of manuscripts rejected before external peer-review, 88.5% were rejected by senior editors and the editor-in-chief. This shows the importance of senior editors in protecting the valuable time of associate editors for the manuscripts with the best prospects of eventual publication in MBE. Overall, almost one-third of original submissions were offered a transfer to *Genome Biology and Evolution* (GBE), with 60% of these offers made by senior editors before assignment of associate editors or external review. The number of manuscripts offered a transfer to GBE continues to increase, both as immediate transfers (216 in 2020, 340 in 2021) and transfers following external review (157 in 2020, 236 in 2021).

The editorial office at MBE has been preparing for another major transition as Drs Claudia Russo and Brandon Gaut will begin their terms as co-Editors-in-Chief in July 2022. After 10 years of service, the outgoing Editor-in-Chief, Sudhir Kumar, is looking forward to spending more time on research, teaching, and administration. The outgoing Editor-in-Chief and other members of the editorial office staff (Managing Editor Heather Rowe, Editorial Assistant Tom Whitehead, and Press Officer Joe Caspermeyer) are helping to familiarize the new with the current operations of MBE. We look forward to the next phase of MBE's evolution under the new leadership.