

Impact of letters to the editor and publications in 2023

A letter to the editor constitutes a short communication addressing a range of topics pertinent to the readership of a journal (Dkhar, 2018). This format offers several benefits, such as timeliness, accessibility, innovation, and conciseness, thereby serving as an effective means to disseminate cutting-edge scientific ideas. Over the past five years, there has been a considerable increase in the number of letters published, representing the highest growth rate (approximately 20%) observed in the last three decades (Figure 1A). In the field of academic publishing, letters to the editor are typically more concise than typical research papers. However, there is no prescribed standard for their length, which varies substantially across different journals. An analysis of letters published in 2021, based on the data from the Web of Science, indicates that most letters were one to nine pages long (Figure 1B), with the longest letter extending to 72 pages. Similarly, the number of references in these letters ranged from zero to 30 citations (Figure 1C), with the highest number of citations reaching 206.

Zoological Research (ZR), paralleling other scientific journals, publishes a relatively high proportion of letters to the editor, constituting approximately 40% of its total publications in 2021 and 2022. This publishing strategy is a response to the consistent increase in manuscript submissions in recent years, with the aim to efficiently disseminate significant yet concise findings through letters to the editor. In addition, by increasing the number of letters to the editor, a journal may elevate its impact factor. This effect occurs because these letters, while contributing to the total citation count, are not included in the denominator for impact factor calculation, which is restricted to review and research articles.

In 2022, despite strict length criteria for letters to the editor published in ZR, generally limited to no more than 15 references and five print pages, a considerable number of letters were erroneously reclassified as articles by the Web of Science, despite their correct categorization at the time of indexing. Efforts to appeal to the Web of Science for rectification of these classifications were unsuccessful. This incorrect re-categorization of letters as articles resulted in a sharp decrease in the impact factor of ZR, which was released in 2023. Thus, to prevent similar occurrences in the future, the journal has resolved to reduce the number of letters it publishes. It is important to emphasize that ZR remains committed to the publication of original and influential research (Yao & Zhang, 2022).

We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation to all supporters of ZR. The editorial

team encourages continued submission of high-quality manuscripts, as your contributions are the driving force behind the advancement of our journal. In 2023, ZR was honored to publish many prominent research articles. For instance, Liu et al. (2023) provided evidence supporting a scenario of placental radiation characterized by both basal cladogenesis and active interordinal divergences spanning the Late Cretaceous to the Paleogene. Lyu et al. (2023) proposed a new 10-genus classification for the Asian horned toad subfamily Megophryinae based on phylogenetic relationships and morphological differences and further reviewed the taxonomic history of Asian horned toad species in China. Sitthivong et al. (2023) described a new microendemic genus and species of a limestone-dwelling agamid lizard (Squamata: Agamidae: Draconinae) from Laos, which was read more than 16 000 times within three weeks of its online publication, representing the most viewed ZR paper published in 2023. Qiu et al. (2023) identified and described eight subspecies of mainland *Apis cerana*, providing insights into their evolutionary history and subspecies boundaries to enable customized conservation strategies for both widespread and endemic honeybee populations, thereby informing colony introduction and breeding strategies.

Many excellent papers related to animal models and disease mechanisms were also published in 2023. For instance, Nadal-Nicolás et al. (2023) thoroughly reviewed and analyzed the specificity of nine markers for the unambiguous identification of all or most RGCs (i.e., pan-RGC markers), a crucial prerequisite for studying their degeneration and neuroprotection, across rats, mice, and macaques. Liu et al. (2023) revealed that monkeys show heightened sensitivity to the facial expressions of conspecifics compared to those of humans, offering new insights into inter-species communication. Li et al. (2023) presented a comprehensive analysis of the genetic and physiological attributes critical for the sustained expansion of undifferentiated spermatogonial stem cells in tree shrews and proposed an effective strategy for extended *in vitro* maintenance. Guo et al. (2023) generated a single-nucleus transcriptomic atlas of all major liver cell types, mapping the multicellular networks that regulate mild to severe mammalian liver fibrosis, at different stages of murine carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄)-induced progressive liver fibrosis. Wang et al. (2023) developed a scopolamine injection model to replicate delirium-like phenotypes in mice, offering clues regarding the mechanisms underlying delirium onset, an acute neuropsychiatric syndrome common in the elderly and an independent risk factor for later dementia. Zhang et al. (2023) reported that pre-existing diabetes can exacerbate lung damage in SARS-CoV-2 infection and found that low-molecular-weight heparin may be a valuable therapeutic approach for managing COVID-19 in diabetic patients. In an extensive review, Pan et al. (2023) discussed recent advancements in the cGAS-STING signaling pathway, vital in the innate immune system's defense against external

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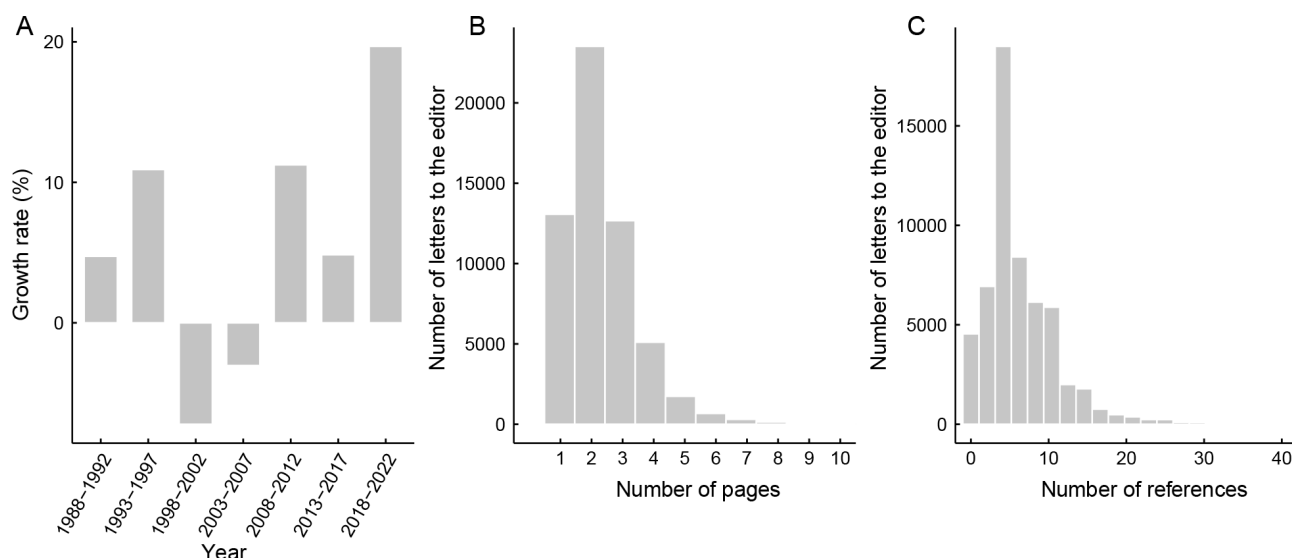


Figure 1 Information on letters to the editor based on Web of Science analysis

A: Growth rate of papers in the letters to the editor category in the past 30 years. The growth rate was calculated by comparing data from each five-year period with the previous five-year period. B, C: Number distribution of print pages (B) and references (C) in each paper in the letters category in 2021. Data used in this analysis were retrieved from the Web of Science.

pathogens and internal damage, and explored new avenues for further study.

While space limitations prevent us from listing all excellent ZR papers within this editorial, we remain confident that ZR will continue to flourish and expand in the new year. Despite the challenges posed by the misclassification of letters to the editor published in 2021–2022 as articles by Web of Science, which has affected our impact factor, the influence of ZR in the field continues to rise. Additionally, we warmly welcome submissions to our new journal *Zoological Research – Diversity and Conservation (ZRDC)*, which aspires to become a leading publication in conservation and biodiversity.

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