

Oryx: continuity and change

Oryx first appeared long before conservation science was recognized as a scientific discipline and for about 65 years it was the only journal that published material concerned with international conservation. Authors of articles believed that wildlife conservation mattered, they wanted to disseminate information and they wanted something to be done about particular conservation problems. They were usually very active in conservation, working on reserves, influencing decision makers and raising funds. That profile is also probably true today but the writing style has changed. Authors of early papers sometimes wrote about conservation problems using language that would today be regarded as emotive and would have no place in a scientific journal. I recall, in particular, an article published in August 1955 (Lillie, 1955). Dr Harry R. Lillie sailed with the sealing fleet from Canada in 1949 as fleet surgeon, with the purpose of studying seals and making a film about sealing conditions. As well as discussing the conservation issues in moderate terms he was obviously upset by the sometimes "... evil ways of this species known as civilized man..." He observed a young man driving a towing hook through a baby seal's jaw without first killing it and recounted how, when the man came to him later to have a tooth extracted he was "... not too particular about the painlessness of that operation." He also commented on the loss of sealing ships in the harsh Arctic conditions, writing "If there is to be justice against wanton destruction and cruelty, then in the sealing industry there will continue to be retribution by the loss of ships and men for as long as we behave as we do." It is hard to imagine such writing getting past the Editor today because over the years *Oryx* has evolved into a scientific journal, publishing scientific papers in which objectivity is required and where there is no place for value judgements or emotive statements.

As well as being the only place for the early conservationists to publish articles, *Oryx* also served as the only regular source of conservation news. Its *Editorial Notes* recorded the establishment of new nature reserves, destruction of species, enactment of conservation legislation, appointments of game wardens, as well as the results of the Society's conservation endeavours in many parts of the globe. When Maisie Fitter succeeded Lt Col. C.L. Boyle as Editor in 1964,

she replaced *Editorial Notes* with *Notes and News* and *News in Brief*, the former reporting items of more substance and the latter covering a wide range of topical information in one or two sentences. *News in Brief* was replaced by *Briefly* in September 1971 and by February 1982 its coverage had expanded from one to 11 pages and was organized by regional and other headings. *Briefly* has been one of the strengths of *Oryx* for more than 30 years and continues to be a valuable part of the journal. It occupies even more column inches today, and cites the sources of its news items, a change that became vital when it was relaunched as an academic journal.

The development of conservation science and its recognition as an academic discipline in the 1960s led to commercial publishers perceiving an unfilled niche in the scientific journal market. In 1968 the first issue of *Biological Conservation* appeared. It represented competition for *Oryx*; academic scientists who needed to publish for career development and to attract research funding were more likely to submit their papers to an academic journal. In 1983, with a new format and design, a commercial publisher, its first Editorial Board and a systematic peer review process, *Oryx* was relaunched as a quarterly academic journal. The time was right: *Conservation Biology* followed in 1987, *Biodiversity and Conservation* in 1992 and *Animal Conservation* in 1998. During this time, as Editor from 1982 to 1999, I saw *Oryx* change from being mainly a membership journal into one that could hold its own in conservation publishing.

While *Oryx* faced increased competition, it remained important for authors who were not academics but believed passionately in conservation and were also active in trying to get things changed. *Oryx* is the only international conservation publication that would accept descriptive papers: accounts of national parks and reserves, surveys of poorly known places of potential conservation importance, species status surveys, and case studies of conservation projects such as the indigenous bulb propagation project in Turkey (Entwistle *et al.*, 2002) and the Mountain Gorilla Project (Kalpers *et al.*, 2003). It has also continued to attract submissions from academic scientists and has become increasingly attractive to them over the last few years, as evidenced by its rising impact factor and the marked increase in submission rates.

Oryx started as a membership journal and until relatively recently carried news of the Society's activities. Even when relaunched as a scientific journal in 1983 it retained a section for Society news until April 1994, when the first issue of the members' newsletter, *Fauna and Flora News* (now *Fauna & Flora*), was published. This decision was taken to enable more papers to be published in *Oryx*, and at the same time to fulfil obligations to the institutional membership, to provide a vehicle that allowed more detailed communication about the Society's activities to its members and to act as a promotional tool. So, while *Oryx* ceased to be a membership journal it remained the journal of the Society.

Oryx stands apart from other journals in the field by publishing a greater proportion of papers by authors from the developing world. A comparison of papers published between 1999 and 2000 in *Animal Conservation*, *Biodiversity and Conservation*, *Biological Conservation*, *Conservation Biology* and *Oryx* revealed that their focus varied dramatically. Between 20 and 44% of papers published in the first four journals focused on the developing world compared with 96% of papers in *Oryx*. The fact that the first four journals published so little on Asia, Africa and Latin America is unexpected – these regions of the world are where the world's biodiversity 'hotspots' are concentrated and where one would hope that most work is being done. If one looks at the nationalities of the principal authors of those papers published between 1999 and 2000, 30 and 36% of the authors in *Oryx* and *Biodiversity Conservation*, respectively, were from the developing world compared with between 7 and 13% in the other three journals. It is significant that both *Oryx* and *Biodiversity Conservation* actively encourage authors from the developing world.

These findings are supported by Navjot & Liow (2000), who examined papers published in 1996–98 by the major international journals. They found that only 3% of papers focused on South-east Asia, a 'megabiodiversity' region. The exception was *Oryx*, with 17% of its papers focused on this region. They concluded that the main reasons for this under-representation were, firstly, that there were too few scientists working in South-east Asia. There was little economic incentive to fund classical research on natural history, taxonomy and ecology in the region and conservation science was not highly regarded as a career. Secondly, the research that does take place in the region is predominantly descriptive and only *Oryx* will take such material. They commented that journals should take such papers because faunal and floral

inventories are urgently needed as a foundation before science can move towards developed-world standards that emphasize correlative and experimental work. Thirdly, they highlighted the problem of scientists in the region having limited access to international conservation biology journals because of their high subscription rates. *Oryx* has tried to address this problem by introducing a category of sponsor membership, which includes an additional subscription for *Oryx* in a developing country.

Oryx continues to move with the times; its design and format have changed periodically to reflect contemporary trends, it is available in both printed and electronic versions, it uses online-only appendices for material too lengthy to print, and its content has evolved to include a wide variety of material – especially notable are the increasing content on botanical conservation (e.g. Maunder *et al.*, 2002) and human social issues relating to conservation (e.g. Noss & Cuéllar, 2001). *Oryx* is well established and highly regarded. It has an important role in recording conservation events and progress as well as being a vehicle for authors to disseminate their research. Over the last 100 years it has published a wealth of material unmatched in coverage either in time or content, and it is welcome news that this will be available near the end of this year on a CD-ROM.

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