

Evolutionary Ecology Research

Who knew it was an open access journal?

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FOLLOWING the advice of Steve Bosch, Tech Librarian of the University of Arizona, I logged into the website of ALCTS (The Association for Library Collections and Technical Services). I am not a librarian, just a professor of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology. But I have been in bed with librarians for seventeen years. Together we have faced the need to maintain access to the work done by scholars and published in primary journals. You all know the problem. My part of the solution, *Evolutionary Ecology Research*, is beginning its seventeenth volume (2016) and is still chugging away.

I write this however, not to recount the thrilling, heart-pounding romance of *EER*; of David staring down Goliath. One day you will read about our exciting launch; our seven lawyers in the first year; our legal warning that my wife and I could lose almost all we owned if the publishing behemoth that overtly threatened us actually took us to court; of our continuing adventures as we navigated the challenging, at times treacherous world of publishing. And I do not write it to reveal that without the gracious help of librarians, we surely would have failed.

INSTEAD I write because, as I drilled down into the LRTS site, I found an eye-opening document, *Association for library collections and technical services statement on open access*. In contrast to the quasi-religious pronouncements about open access publishing that often characterize other groups, ALCTS champions positions that are flexible and practical. Perhaps because it itself is a publisher, ALCTS seems to know the most about what is needed to be accomplished and how a variety of approaches could get us there. *Mirabile dictu*, *Evolutionary Ecology Research* had pursued one of those approaches from its very beginning, four years before the term ‘open access’ stormed the world in the 2003 Berlin Declaration. In fact, *EER* had chosen exactly the same path as *LRTS*, i.e, the green road to open access!

MANY in the community believe that only the gold road qualifies a journal as open access. For example, for a journal to be included in the *Directory of Open Access Journals*, the full text of all its content must be available for free without an embargo period.

But ALCTS is wiser. It knows that someone must pay for the costs of publication and that the gold road allows for payment solely by authors or their funders. ALCTS points out two possible limitations of that scheme.

First, external funding is not so generous in many scholarly areas such as the humanities and social sciences. Second, small societies and professional organizations with modest operating budgets that publish journals may not have the resources to pay all the publication costs incurred by their authors.

MY experience with *EER* suggests additional limitations, too.

Research support in many countries is scant and difficult to get; *EER* wanted to be sure that the researchers in no country were disadvantaged because they could not pay page charges or publication fees. The green road makes that possible. Moreover, *EER* has always tried to encourage the novel concepts and hypotheses that can be a problem to get funded. Finally, although ecology and evolution are certainly hard sciences, grant funding is considerably scarcer and less bountiful in these areas than, say, in cellular biology or cancer research. Partly that is because, with new analyses using modern software, so much good work in evolutionary ecology can be done rather cheaply. And, one must admit, partly it is simply a tradition that society supports such research quite parsimoniously.

MY POINT is that the green road also exists and has advantages and disadvantages that differ from those of the gold road. Disadvantages of the gold road? This is not the place for a full examination of what we need to watch closely as the gold road extends its influence on journal

publishing. But watch we must.

For example, payment for publication in some gold-road journals may move from author to publisher without a gatekeeper. The publisher has a vested interest in collecting the fees; the author has a vested interest in adding a line to a CV. So neither party is free from conflict of interest. *Caveat lector*.

Of course, the best gold-road journals have editorial boards that act responsibly as gatekeepers. But there is no denying that the internet makes it cheap to set up a new journal without the support of library subscriptions or the oversight implicit in a traditional subscription relationship.

IN MY OPINION, the *EER* policies that align it with ALCTS and make it a green-road journal could be usefully emulated by many journals with both fire-walls and a mission to serve academia. Permit me, please, to summarize them.

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educational purposes, including such things as course packs. After the first year, they are free to put their work on any website, and they are encouraged to do so.

I was cheered and proud to realize how remarkably close all that is to the policies of *ALCTS*. In fact, I felt much like Moliere's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who, you recall, was astonished to discover that he had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it.
