

## EDITORIAL

6 years at *Heredity*

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As I approach the end of my six-year term as Editor-in-Chief of *Heredity*, I thought it would be a good opportunity to go through some of the changes we have made that we hope have improved the experience of authors, reviewers and Associate Editors. First, I would like to welcome Sara Goodacre, who took over as Editor-in-Chief, as of August 1, 2022. Sara is coming back to *Heredity* after serving as Associate Editor from March 2011 to December 2018. We are also introducing the new role of Co-Editor-in-Chief, which will be taken on by Aurora Ruiz-Herrera, who has been an associate editor at *Heredity* for the past 10 years. Aurora has already helped me with additional tasks, such as judging student papers for our annual prize competition. Aurora and Sara will decide on how the work will be divided but hopefully this will also make the role of Editor-in-Chief more feasible for future editors. We are also fortunate that Sandra Huettenbuegel, the administrative assistant who started with me, has agreed to continue on with Sara and Aurora. Sandra has helped to make the experience of authors, reviewers and editors more enjoyable (as well as mine!!) because of her highly personalised touch to communication. This was particularly appreciated by all during the pandemic, when we relaxed our normal focus on time and instead tried to help everyone get through the tasks.

*Heredity* is the official journal of the Genetics Society; although profits are shared between the society and the publisher, the society would not be able to give back to the community without their journal income. Income raised from subscriptions and open access fees feeds back directly into grant opportunities, such as Junior Scientist travel grants, Genes and Development summer studentships, Communicating Your Science workshops and *Heredity* fieldwork grants. The Genetics Society also supports conferences held by special interest groups, such as the annual Population Genetics Group, or one-off requests for genetics-related meetings. They also contribute to various outreach events; one of my favourites was manning a genetics display at the Chelsea Flower show in 2019. One of the greatest benefits of my role as Editor-in-Chief was the opportunity to get directly involved in Genetics Society activities. Throughout my term, we have tried to integrate the journal more with the society by organising special issues around Genetics Society events (e.g., [Mendel's birthday](#)), advertising *Heredity* events more prominently on the Genetics Society website and newsletter, and including Genetics Society Committee members in strategic decision making for the journal.

The Genetics Society has also supported revival of the [Heredity podcast](#). In the capable hands of James Burgon this includes lots of fascinating science chats with authors who published in *Heredity*, as well as editors and interviews with conference attendees. The *Heredity* podcast nicely complements the official podcast of the Genetics Society, [Genetics Unzipped](#) (written and presented by Kat Arney). Both podcasts are well worth a listen, if you haven't already.

One of the largest challenges over the past few years for society journals has been the implications of [Plan S](#), which promotes a move towards exclusively open access publishing. Since we encourage submissions from regions of the world with limited funding and from early career researchers, we have tried to keep costs to authors down; for example, by abolishing colour page charges in 2019. Although we encourage open access, we thus still rely on subscriptions for the majority of the journal income, rather than putting all of the costs onto the authors. *Heredity* is part of the Transformative Publishing initiative by Springer Nature and is included in a wide range of [Institutional Open Access agreements](#). Nevertheless, we, along with many other society journals, have seen a drop in submissions over the past few years. We suspect that this is at least partly due to perceptions about hybrid journals but also due to the overwhelming workloads that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to academics across the globe.

When Sandra and I started, our first ambition was to improve the efficiency of the time taken to secure reviewers and make decisions on papers. Prior to the pandemic, one of our achievements was to decrease time for all aspects of the editorial process. We accomplished this through various changes: decreasing the default time given to reviewers from three weeks to two weeks (but maintaining flexibility through personalised communication with reviewers); introducing a policy of rejecting without review but encouraging resubmit for manuscripts for which the language quality was not sufficient to make efficient use of the peer review process or those that lacked a general message but showed more promise in the author cover letter or body of the text; communicating more efficiently with our Associate Editors and maintaining a manageable workload; and collaborating on manuscripts when an Associate Editor knew that they would be unavailable for extended periods. Sandra and I also both prefer to process manuscripts daily, rather than letting tasks accumulate. Even during the pandemic, we were able to maintain reasonable turn-around times, despite the additional flexibility given to authors, reviewers and Associate Editors during these challenging times. Although there was a much longer tail of manuscripts with long decision times, we maintained the [core timings](#) throughout.

Throughout my term at *Heredity*, I have participated in Meet the Editors sessions at international conferences; despite acting as a mechanism for recruitment of manuscripts, an interesting aspect for me has been to hear different perspectives from other Editors-in-Chief. *Heredity* is a small journal and our focus is on the experience of the authors, reviewers and Associate editors, but without compromising the high quality that has been a feature in the 75 years that the journal has been in circulation. Although our impact factor has remained relatively stable, we are not likely to attract authors who view that metric as one of the most important. However, we are a signatory of the [Declaration on Research Assessment](#) (DORA), so we have focused on increasing our profile, through social media and other means, to increase citation rates

of individual papers. I use the cover letter as a means to flag to the Associate Editors where the generality of the message might not come through in the body of the paper but there appears to be more potential based on what authors say in their comments. This is particularly effective when authors don't just repeat the abstract but sell the novelty or why they think that their results would be of interest to the wide readership of *Heredity*.

Another priority for the *Heredity* editorial team has been to support early career researchers. We encourage joint reviews by more senior and junior reviewers but give credit to both. In 2019 we also introduced a prize for the best student paper published in the journal. The winners receive a cash prize, membership in the Genetics Society, and present their research at a Genetics Society sponsored conference, such as the annual Population Genetics Group meeting. James also interviews them for a podcast and the papers from all of the short-listed applicants are compiled as a collection on the *Heredity* website. Associate Editors are encouraged to work with more junior authors to help them to improve their submissions, even if it takes more rounds of revision than for some more senior authors.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Lucinda Haines, who was our "handler" at Nature and then Springer-Nature until just before the end of my term. She helped us to raise the profile of the journal through improved social media, and continual improvements to the website, including suggesting that we put together web collections of papers on particular topics; for example, special issues and collections to celebrate anniversaries of *Heredity*, the [Population Genetics Group](#), and the [Genetics Society](#), along with topics that have featured in the journal over many years (e.g., [plant mating system evolution](#); [sex chromosome](#)

[evolution](#); [virus evolution](#), [women in genetics](#), [student prize winners](#)), and the top choice papers based on citations ([readers' choice](#)) or [editors' recommendations](#). We also assembled a collection of *Heredity* publications in honour of the seminal work of [Bill Hill](#), along with an [obituary](#) celebrating his scientific life contributed to by two of our Associate Editors (Armando Caballero and Jinliang Wang).

I would also like to thank the excellent team of Associate Editors at *Heredity*, whose positive attitudes, flexibility and support to authors has made it an absolute pleasure to work with them. They have helped to keep the journal up to date by contributing to updating the [journal's remit](#) and suggesting strategies for encouraging more submissions; for example, introduction of a [computer notes](#) category. Our reviews editor, Frank Hailer, has worked hard to attract timely reviews and to improve the scope and accessibility of those recruited or submitted. We have also had a number of excellent guest editors for special issues and have particularly benefited from targeting symposia at conferences such as the European Society for Evolutionary Biology or more specialised events, such as the "Plant Quantitative Genetics: from Theory into Practice" workshop.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the authors and referees who have worked hard to maintain the high standards of *Heredity*. It remains my favourite journal and I hope to continue to contribute "from the other side" throughout the rest of my academic career.

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