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## Frontiers of Biogeography

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Research letters at the frontiers of biogeography

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## Research letters at the frontiers of biogeography

Biogeography in general and macroecology in particular are rapidly becoming established as areas within the wide field of ecology and evolution where some of the most vibrant and exciting research is done. This is evident in the high profile of the meetings of the International Biogeography Society (IBS), whose Sixth Biennial Conference will be held this January in Miami (see Gavin & Feeley 2012 for details). It is also evident in the creation of interest groups within the most important ecological societies, such as the brand new Macroecology Special Interest Group of the British Ecological Society, launched in a popular meeting in London in June 2012 (Krystalli & Webb 2012). Research in biogeography now covers a wide array of topics from the organization of communities to the imprint that location leaves in the evolutionary structure of life. A number of good examples can be found in the increasing list of perspective articles published by *Frontiers of Biogeography*, including the two appearing in this issue. One delves into the controversial – though useful – concept of keystone species, building from old definitions to assess its potential value today (Cottee-Jones & Whittaker 2012). The other discusses why historical biogeography may be more informative than (or at least complementary to) the more widespread phylogeographic approaches and the increasingly used community phylogenetics (Wiens 2012).

Another good indicator of the current standing of biogeographical research is the increasing number of submissions to biogeography journals and their high impact factors. To answer this demand, apart from the aforementioned perspectives and the usual news & update articles, this issue of *Frontiers* includes the first article of the new research letters section (Dawson 2012). Up to volume 3, *Frontiers* explicitly aimed not to publish research articles reporting new data, instead targeting areas that were less well repre-

sented in the established biogeography journals (e.g., book reviews, opinions and perspectives). The introduction of research letters originated from a suggestion from a member of the IBS not in the editorial board of the journal—illustrating the point that we always welcome suggestions from you. Adding research letters recognizes the high standards of, and increasing interest in, biogeography; the main biogeography journals (*Diversity and Distributions*, *Ecography*, *Global Ecology and Biogeography*, *Journal of Biogeography*) all receive far more good papers than they can publish and have all maintained impact factors above 4 since 2009 or earlier. Those journals are at or near the top of the ‘Biodiversity Conservation’ and ‘Physical Geography’ categories (respectively) and high up the much longer list of ‘Ecology’ journals at Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports<sup>1</sup>. Clearly there is room for another outlet for good research in biogeography, and this is our first major reason for the new section. After all, as a society journal, our first vocation is to provide a service to biogeographers.

Research letters are short, typically being about 2,500 words<sup>2</sup>. The other biogeography journals typically publish research articles of 5,000 words or longer. Given this difference we think that, with the research letters, *Frontiers* is offering a new service to biogeographers: the opportunity to publish shorter, highly focused, yet consequential, papers in a specialist biogeography journal, and one that has the widest, most open access. We also encourage collections of research letters to be submitted as symposium proceedings, which have limited space in the other biogeography journals, where they may be complemented by related opinions, perspectives, reviews, and an editorial. We also welcome controversial papers—as long as they are not fundamentally flawed and are supported by appropriate evidence or argument. In other words, we are willing to take a bit of a risk

1. [http://thomsonreuters.com/products\\_services/science/science\\_products/a-z/journal\\_citation\\_reports/](http://thomsonreuters.com/products_services/science/science_products/a-z/journal_citation_reports/)

2. See <http://escholarship.org/uc/search?entity=fb;view=submissionguidelines>, ‘Manuscript preparation and submission’ section.

in publishing interesting research.

In keeping with the intended high profile and high impact of the new section, we also intend to offer timely publication: ~6 weeks from submission to first decision (or 2 weeks for submissions that do not require external review). We seek high quality standards via rigorous peer review, but at *Frontiers* we encourage Editors to adopt a 'critical friend' approach to handling submissions. Whilst it is very important to reject papers that are fundamentally flawed or clearly unsuitable for the journal, if there is potential in a manuscript then the section editor aims to guide the authors towards realizing that potential. Following acceptance, copy-editing happens rapidly (usually just a few days) so articles typically appear less than 6 months after first submission. Publication provides completely open access at no cost to the reader and very low or zero cost to the author. We believe all these improvements will make *Frontiers* the high-quality service for biogeographers that the current development of the discipline deserves.

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