

## SPECIAL COMMENTARY

# ISMEJ turns 10: tracking rapid progress in microbial ecology

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May 2017 marks the 10-year anniversary of *The ISME Journal*. When starting this endeavor 10 years ago, we wanted *ISMEJ* to become ‘The Place To Be’ for publishing and reading high-quality studies in microbial ecology. The goal was not merely to have impressive and advanced studies published, but also to publish intriguing ecological stories of broad biological interest. We wanted *ISMEJ* readers to look forward to receiving their issue every month so they could page through and read about cool stories in microbial ecology. In our increasingly digital world, this ideal clearly dates the journal’s editors, but the goal still remains: What’s new in microbial ecology? *ISMEJ* is the place to look.

### The ISMEJ philosophy

The field of microbial ecology advanced rapidly over the past decade. With the continued influx of high-throughput sequencing and other ‘omics’ approaches, our depth of perception of our microbial world has taken several quantum leaps. Perhaps more importantly, large strides have been made in transforming microbial ecology from a mostly descriptive discipline to a field in which theory and prediction are mainstream. With this in mind, this 10-year anniversary is an appropriate moment to reflect on the general philosophy of *ISMEJ*. We have often been asked whether it is required to have large sequencing data sets or high-tech analytical methods

to be considered for publication in *ISMEJ*. Our answer has always been, ‘No’. Of course, methodology must be sound and well-suited toward answering the scientific question posed. However, *ISMEJ* has always been far more interested in the questions being asked and the novel results generated. So, when contemplating submission to *ISMEJ*, one should consider: Is this new? Is it interesting also beyond this specific field? Does the work significantly advance the field of microbial ecology? If the answer to these questions is yes, the study may well be appropriate for *ISMEJ*, regardless of the system being studied or the flashiness of the methods.

### Growth and the citation game

Microbial ecology is a rapidly and continuously growing field, and we are pleased to see that across disciplines there is a general acceptance that microbial ecology is in fact at the heart of numerous important issues and processes on our small planet; from obesity and autism, to wastewater treatment and food production and on to disease prevention, crop protection and climate change. And, of course, fueling the general curiosity of the wonder of single-cell function, how they interact with communities as well as the pathogens and genes they share and exchange. Then consider the extent and range of habitats and extreme environments microbes colonize. Over the past decade, *ISMEJ*’s size and influence has also grown. The journal has increased the number of papers published, and more importantly, citation numbers continue to

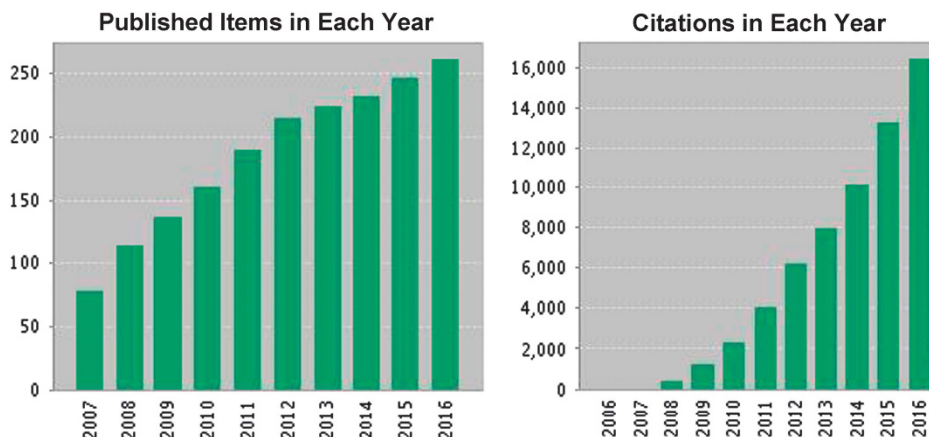


Figure 1 Number of items published and citations for the ISME Journal according to the IST Web of Science.

expand rapidly year-to-year (see Figure 1), with *ISMEJ* papers being cited more than 16 000 times in 2016 alone. Of course, this growth also is reflected in a tremendous increase in submissions to the journal over the years. We editors have therefore been somewhat victims of *ISMEJ* success, but we can think of worse fates than being inundated by large numbers of high-quality manuscripts.

The number of journals published in the field of microbial ecology has also increased significantly in the past decade. In general, we do not, however, see this as a topic of concern or competition. This simply reflects the fact that the field of microbial ecology continues to grow and expand. As a society journal, we seek to expand and promote the field of microbial ecology, and our cause is only helped by the influx of new players and publication outlets in the field.

Over the years, we have received many questions and comments about *ISMEJ*'s impact factor. While many people find this important, we wish to reiterate that *ISMEJ* has never based publication decisions simply upon whether a given manuscript is expected to be highly cited. Of course, citation numbers in some way measure quality and breadth of interest, but the *ISMEJ* editors have always attempted to set a standard based upon novelty and advance, not citation potential.

## Thank-yous

Such an anniversary is also the appropriate time to offer thanks to the many people who have made *ISMEJ* such a success.

Thanks to Submitters: The quality of *ISMEJ* stems principally from the quality of the manuscripts we receive. We thank all of the colleagues who have submitted their most exciting work to *ISMEJ*. From the first people who supported this unknown and unproven journal in 2007, to those researchers who still choose *ISMEJ* over other possible publication outlets as 'the' place to publish. Who would argue? Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!

Thanks to Reviewers and EB members: It would be impossible to produce *ISMEJ* without the input from thousands of volunteer reviewers. Your valued input has been appreciated over the years. Editorial Board members, past and present, deserve a special thank you, as you take up a disproportionate part of the reviewing load and help maintain the *ISMEJ* standard.

Thanks to the Editors, past and present: The editorial team of *ISMEJ* has grown throughout the years to help accommodate growing manuscript

traffic. We thank all of the editors who have so remarkably dedicated their time, efforts and wisdom to the journal.

Thanks to the founders, the publisher and the ISME office: Of course, *ISMEJ* would never have materialized if not for the tremendous efforts of Yehuda Cohen, Staffan Kjelleberg, Hans Van Veen and Hilary Lappin-Scott. Your vision made *ISMEJ* a reality. And of course, The Nature Publishing Group (now Springer Nature) made it all possible—they believed in us enough to take a chance and have continued to support us over the past decade. We should never forget that the ISME office has also been instrumental in making *ISMEJ* a success and the editors would have been lost without you.

Special thanks: Two people stand out when it comes to deserving special attention in the *ISMEJ* thank-you list: Pooja Aggarwal from Springer Nature has been with *ISMEJ* from the start, and her heart and soul have gone into making *ISMEJ* a success. We have seen many excellent people come and go at the publishing house, but Pooja has always been there for the journal. And lastly, Sarash de Wilde of course deserves the final praise. Miss ISME! Dearest thanks for your countless efforts.

## Moving forward

The founding editors have finally made way for their successors. Ian Head assumed the reigns in 2015, and it is with great pleasure and excitement that we welcome Kazuya Watanabe as the new co-editor-in-chief of *ISMEJ* this year. All associated with the journal are extremely pleased and excited to have Kazuya as the new *ISMEJ* torchbearer. Although there is a level of melancholy associated with passing the torch, this is more than compensated by the knowledge that Kazuya and Ian will most certainly steer the journal toward continued success in the coming years. The publishing landscape is continuously changing, bringing certain uncertainties with it. However, with a great editorial team in place, support from the microbial ecology community and continued cooperation with ISME and the publisher, we can be most confident that *ISMEJ* will thrive in its second decade. The wonders of microbial ecology continue to be revealed by diverse research teams across the globe, and the goals of *ISMEJ* remain the same; to publish the most exciting and interesting of these advances. Here's to the future of microbial ecology and *ISMEJ*, we can't wait...