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Editorial

Fifteen Years of Marine Biodiversity in the Journal *Diversity* and the Importance of Publishing Natural History Field Notes

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Diversity's Special Issue "15th Anniversary of *Diversity*—Biodiversity, Conservation and Ecology of Animals, Plants and Microorganisms" was launched in 2024 to celebrate 15 years of the journal's existence since its founding in 2009. *Diversity*'s first marine paper, published 17 March 2010, is a review about DNA barcodes [1]. The second one is a review on coral reef management, which came out in May 2010 [2]. Many more regular articles, reviews, communications, and other kinds of papers followed, while the numbers of publications per year increased as well. This motivated the publisher and editors of *Diversity* to distribute its contents over multiple sections.

The Marine Diversity section was founded in 2017, under its first section Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Dr. Christian Wild, who stepped down in 2021 and was replaced by the present section Editor-in-Chief. A number of earlier papers were subsequently added to the section to facilitate their visibility and accessibility. The earliest contribution was published in 2013, featuring genetic diversity in coral reef angelfishes [3]. Fifteen years after the first marine contribution, on 17 March 2025, the section contained 714 papers on marine molecular, organismic, and ecosystem biodiversity. The section covered a large range of research themes, such as (1) community and ecosystem ecology, (2) conservation management, (3) DNA barcoding and next-generation sequencing, (4) functional morphology, (5) global and local change effects on marine biodiversity, (6) marine biogeography, (7) marine evolution and ecology, (8) population ecology, (9) population genetics, (10) systematics, taxonomy and phylogeny, (11) restoration ecology, (12) secondary metabolites, and (15) theoretical models. Other marine research themes were also permitted, as long as they fit inside the journal's scope.

Authors were free to decide whether or not they wanted their papers to be part of a section. Because the topics of some marine papers published in *Diversity* fitted into more than one section, not all of them became part of the Marine Diversity section (Table 1). The total number of marine papers published in *Diversity* until the end of 2024 was 1027, nearly 25% of all papers published in *Diversity* at that time. Of these, 695 (68%) were part of the marine section, whereas the remainder became part of other sections or none at all (Table 1). The proportion of marine publications in those sections ranged from 3 to 7%. Some of these belonged to Special Issues that had section-overlapping titles (Table 2). A number of other marine papers were classified as "General" (Table 1). A few of these were pre-section, i.e., before 2019, and several became part of non-descript Special Issues, such as "Diversity in 2022", or of marine Special Issues, such as "Marine Resources Dynamics Under Global Change" (Table 2).

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Table 1. Sections of *Diversity* with their number (and percentage) of papers on marine biodiversity (2009–2024).

Section	Year of First Paper	Total Number of Papers	Year of First Marine Paper	Number of Marine Papers	Percentage of Marine Papers
Animal Diversity	2018	991	2019	58	6%
Biodiversity Conservation	2020	504	2020	23	5%
Biodiversity Loss and Dynamics	2019	209	2019	11	5%
Biogeography and Macroecology	2020	156	2021	10	6%
Chemical Diversity and Chemical Ecology	2020	32	2023	1	3%
Freshwater Biodiversity	2020	117	–	0	0%
Marine Diversity	2013	695	2013	695	100%
Microbial Diversity and Culture Collections	2016	282	2017	19	7%
Phylogeny and Evolution	2019	347	2021	15	4%
Plant Diversity	2016	486	2019	16	3%
General	2009	1205	2010	179	15%

Table 2. Examples of marine article topics (AT) in non-marine sections of *Diversity* and the Special Issue (SI) they belong to.

Section: Animal Diversity
- SI: Systematics and Evolution of Gastropods
  - AT: A nudibranch feeding on a bryozoan-associated hydrozoan [4]

Section: Biodiversity Conservation
- SI: Genetic Diversity, Ecology and Conservation of Endangered Species
  - AT: A review of monitoring sea turtle populations [5]

Section: Biodiversity Loss and Dynamics
- SI: Marine Ecosystem Restoration: Challenges and Opportunities
  - AT: Coral restoration in the Maldives [6]

Section: Biogeography and Macroecology
- SI: Diversity and Spatiotemporal Distribution of Nekton
  - AT: Fish community structure in nearshore waters of Hainan, China [7]

Section: Chemical Diversity and Chemical Ecology
- SI: Not applicable
  - AT: Diversity and natural products of deep-sea Actinobacteria [8]

Section: Microbial Diversity and Culture Collections
- SI: Ecology of Microbes in Marine and Estuarine Ecosystems
  - AT: Microbiome profile of the Mediterranean mussel in Greece [9]

Section: Phylogeny and Evolution
- SI: Reproductive Biology and Molecular Ecology of Turtles
  - AT: Genetic evidence for Indo-Western Pacific olive Ridley sea turtles in Mexican waters [10]

Section: Plant Diversity
- SI: Ecology, Diversity and Conservation of Seagrass
  - AT: The phylogeography of the seagrass *Halophila baillonii* [11]

Section: "General"
- SI: Diversity in 2022
  - AT: Phylogeny of serpulid worms with a new classification [12]
- SI: Diversity in 2023
  - AT: Copepods associated with octocorals [13]
- SI: Diversity in 2024
  - AT: Reef fishes at isolated oceanic reefs in the eastern Indian Ocean [14]
- SI: 2024 Feature Papers by Diversity's Editorial Board Members
  - AT: *Millepora* corals as substrate for *Stylaster* corals [15]
- SI: Advances in the Diversity and Ecology of Zooplankton
  - AT: Zooplankton along the Romanian Black Sea coastline [16]
- SI: Marine Resources Dynamics Under Global Change"
  - AT: Growth fecundity and survival of the sea horse *Hippocampus guttulatus* [17]

Like the other sections, Marine Diversity also has Special Issues. The first one, entitled "Biology, Ecology and Management of Crown-of-Thorns Starfish", contains 18 articles published in 2016 and 2017, one of which is a review paper written by the Guest Editors and a number of co-authors [18]. At present, this is *Diversity*'s most cited paper on marine diversity, as recorded in Web of Science (WoS), which started to report on *Diversity* in 2016. The most-cited marine diversity paper in *Diversity*, according to Google Scholar Citations, is a review of changes in reef fish assemblages in relation to coral reef bleaching, which was published before the start of the Marine Diversity section in a Special Issue on "Coral Reef Diversity: Climate Change and Coral Reef Degradation" [19]. A recent *Diversity* paper that received much attention in the marine literature is a regular article on non-indigenous species in the Mediterranean in the Special Issue entitled "Trends in Marine Non-Indigenous Species in Europe by 2020, and Predictions through Modelling and Horizon Scanning for 2050" [20].

A large portion (84%) of all publications in the marine section (n = 695) belong to a Special Issues (SIs) or topical collections (TC) (Supplementary Table S1). Annually, among the five most highly cited papers of the section, 25% (n = 55) consisted of review papers, whereas review papers only constituted 6% of all *Diversity* papers at the end of 2024 (Supplementary Tables S2 and S3). This shows the importance of Special Issues and review papers, although not all Special Issues are successful in attracting high volumes of papers, and not all review papers are highly cited.

Since the journal's founding, the annual number of marine papers increased until 2023, after which there was a drop (Figure 1). When the annual numbers of marine papers in *Diversity* are compared with those in some specialized marine biology journals, they all show a great degree of fluctuation over the period 2010–2024 (Figure 1). In 2024, *Diversity* received an impact factor (IF) of 2.1, which is not much different from the impact factors of the other journals, ranging from 1.0 to 2.1. These other journals include *Bulletin of Marine Science* (published by the Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric and Earth Science, University of Miami, USA; IF 1.5), *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom* (Cambridge University Press, UK; IF 1.1), *Marine Biodiversity* (Springer, Germany; IF 1.5), *Marine Biology* (Springer, Germany; IF 2.1), *Marine Biology Research* (Taylor and Francis, UK; IF 1.0), and *Marine Ecology* (Wiley-VCH Verlag, Germany; IF 1.5).

These journals may compete with each other and with many other journals that publish on the subject of marine biota. These include journals on marine sciences in general and journals dealing with specific taxa, such as algae, crustaceans, fishes, or mollusks. The publication success of a journal may also be brough about by large Special Issues, like conference proceedings, or it may depend on editorial policy, processing fees, publication speed, rejection rate, and other variables.

The Marine Diversity section has two long-running topical collections. One is about "Marine Invasive Species", and the other one is about "Interesting Images from the Sea". "Interesting Images" is an article category that tries to attract photographs of scientific importance, preferably based on natural history observations. Like other papers in *Diversity*, Interesting Images are peer-reviewed, directly published online, and open access, with a volume and article number. Of the 75 Interesting Images published up to the end of 2024, 65 (87%) are about marine organisms, most of which are part of the topical collection. The photographs should be of good quality and not just depict marine organisms but illustrate novel field observations accompanied by text that explains their scientific relevance. Each paper should contain a minimum of five references to guarantee a solid scientific embedding. It could be about a rare, cryptic, or invasive species, or it could be about a peculiar species-specific trait, for example, related to its behavior, habitat, life history, or morphological adaptation, in order to explain why the reported observation is

novel. Merely a biogeographical note about a new locality record or range expansion is not sufficient. Instead, there should also be a story that explains why the finding in question is noteworthy.

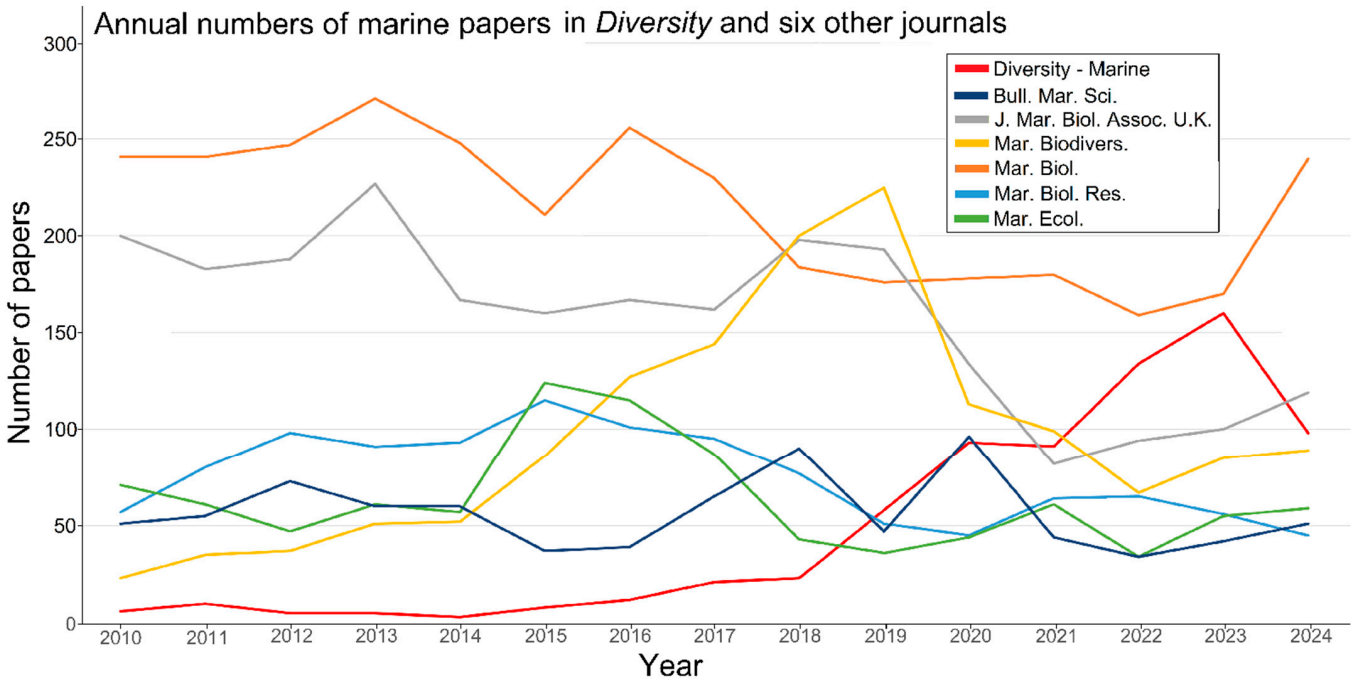

Figure 1. Annual numbers of marine publications in *Diversity* (2010–2024) compared to six other journals with a strong focus on marine biology (*Bulletin of Marine Science*, *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom*, *Marine Biodiversity*, *Marine Biology*, *Marine Biology Research*, and *Marine Ecology*).

Eventually, such published observations could lead to new hypotheses or become the bases for new lines of research. For example, the recent discovery of the coral-cutting behavior shown by a tiny Caribbean crab species [21] can be used to develop several new research questions, such as: (1) does this crab eat the coral fragments that it takes away, (2) how abundant is this crab species within its distribution range, (3) are there any related species that show similar behavior, like in the Indo-Pacific, and (4) what is the impact of this behavior on the coral populations that are targeted by this crab.

The first marine paper in the article category "Interesting Images" was published in 2019; it was about a new host coral record for a commensal shrimp in the Caribbean [22]. Since then, this category has started to grow (Figure 2). The number in the first three months of 2025 is relatively low again, with 1 out of 25 publications (4%) [21]. The marine Interesting Images covered some distinct themes of the years 2019–2024, such as (1) symbiotic partnerships, including newly discovered interspecific associations (n = 13) [22–34]; (2) community ecology dynamics, including ecosystem threats and restoration (n = 13) [35–47]; new biogeographical records of rare, cryptogenic, or non-indigenous species (n = 8) [48–55]; abnormal population distributions, including aggregations and unusual depth range records (n = 8) [56–63]; animal and plant diseases (n = 7) [64–70]; foraging strategies and predator–prey relationships (n = 6) [71–76]; animal behavior (n = 4) [77–80]; life history and reproduction strategies (n = 3) [81–83]; interspecific competition for space (n = 2) [84,85]; and intraspecific morphological variation (n = 1) [86].

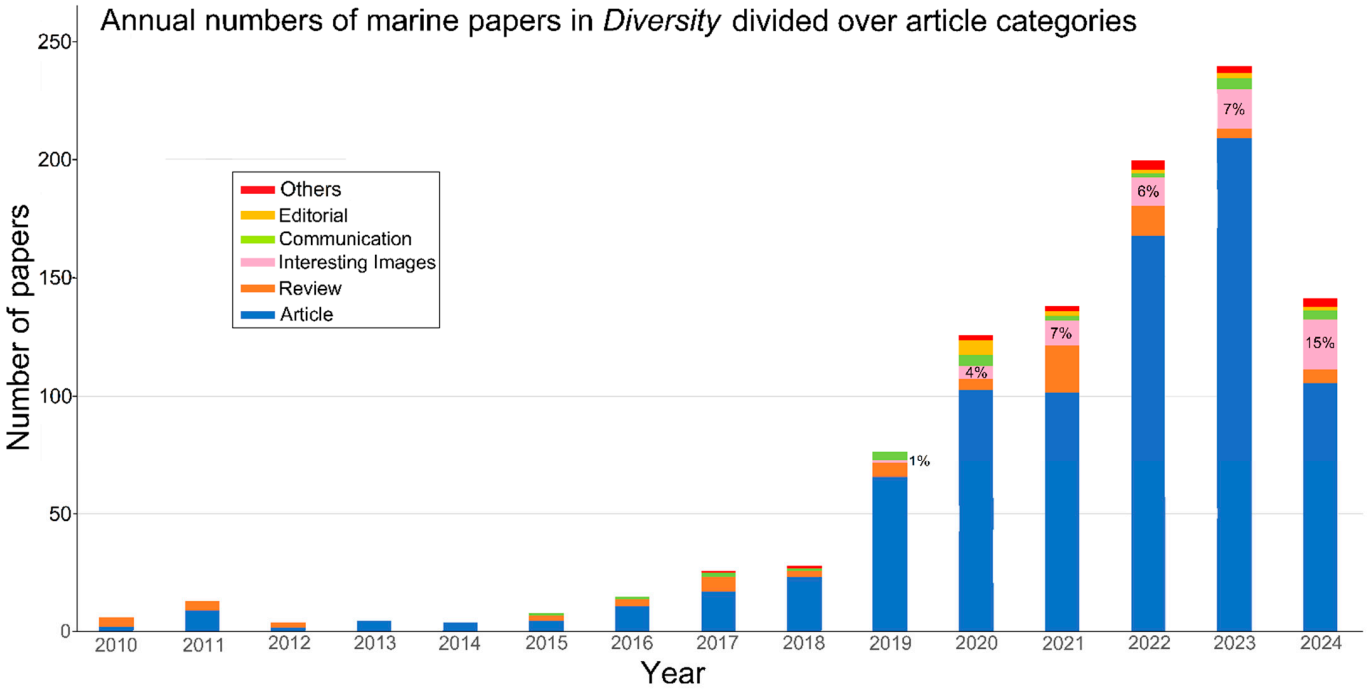

Figure 2. Annual numbers of marine publications in *Diversity* in the period 2010–2024 divided over article categories. The percentages of Interesting Images are specified. "Others" comprises Comment, Correction, Opinion, Technical Note, Perspective, Reply, and Viewpoint.

A few other scientific journals have a comparable article category about natural history field notes. These are about similar topics with a focus on pictures of marine organisms taken underwater or on the shore. Examples include the article series "Oceanarium" of the journal *Marine Biodiversity* [87–91], "Portraits of Marine Science" of *Bulletin of Marine Science* [92–96], "Photogallery" of *Galaxea, Journal of Coral reef Studies* [97–101], and "Baseline" of *Marine Pollution Bulletin* [102–106]. Short natural history notes are also published in more general journals, such as "The Scientific Naturalist" of the journal *Ecology* [107–111] and "Ecosphere Naturalist" of the journal *Ecosphere* [112–116]. Some journals discontinued such article series, such as *Coral Reefs* with respect to its "Reef Sites", which lasted for many years as a series of frequent single-page publications [117–123] until October 2018 [123]. Another journal that started and finished early with respect to these one-page notes was *Zoological Studies*, with the article category "Animal Miraculum" [124–128], which stopped in 2011 [128]. Hopefully, this Editorial will inspire more colleagues to take photographs of observations or search for old ones in their archives and, if these are of sufficiently high quality, consider them for use in a short natural history publication.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/d17040267/s1, Table S1. Papers published in the section Marine Diversity: Proportions of regular articles and papers belonging to Special Issues and Topical Collections; Table S2. Papers of various article categories published in the section Marine Diversity; Table S3. Section Marine Diversity: most cited papers per year by article category.

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