

# The Future of *Restoration Ecology*: Challenges and Opportunities

As indicated in her farewell editorial (Allen 2004), Edie Allen has now stepped down as Editor-in-Chief and I have taken over in that role, with Dr. Sue Yates as Managing Editor. Let me first of all say that it is a great privilege to be able to take over this role at what is an exciting time for the journal, for Society for Ecological Restoration International (SERI), and for restoration ecology in general. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Edie Allen and Sheila Kee over the past few years in guiding the development of the journal, together with all the people who have contributed to the running of the journal, especially the long-standing members of the Editorial Board.

In taking over the running of the journal, I intend to work very much in tandem with Dr. Sue Yates, the Managing Editor. Sue will be handling much of the day-to-day editorial work, and it is she who will mostly communicate with authors and editors. The production of the journal is a team effort involving us as the Editorial Office, the Editorial Board, countless reviewers, and the team at Blackwell—not to mention the authors who provide the material that constitutes the journal.

Numerous changes will be apparent in the journal to all who use it. We have now moved to an electronic manuscript handling system, Manuscript Central, through which all new manuscripts will be submitted and processed. This change was in negotiation between SERI and Blackwell prior to the change in editorship, but we saw it as essential that the two should occur simultaneously—first so that we could design the system appropriately and second that the move to an Australian-based editorial office did not result in lengthy delays through mail problems. Thanks to excellent assistance from Blackwell and Scholar One (who designed and run Manuscript Central), the transition to the new system has been relatively smooth. We are currently working through the manuscripts remaining from the previous system, and within a few months those should be completed, and we will be working entirely electronically.

Concurrently with setting up the new manuscript handling system, I contacted all the members of the Editorial Board to tell them about the new system and to give them the option of continuing or not. This resulted in several long-standing board members electing to stand down, and again I thank them all for their hard work for the journal. At the same time, we conducted an audit of board member areas of expertise and identified gaps or areas that required strengthening and followed this with a recruiting campaign. This resulted in an array of new board members who bring additional expertise in traditional areas covered by the journal, plus some who further broaden the coverage of the board. I aimed to recruit a mixture of senior and early- or mid-career people who can bring a suitable mix of experience and enthusiasm to the board. The efficient functioning of the Editorial Board is essential to the running of the journal, and we hope that our current line up can work well to achieve that.

Most of the feedback we have received on the new manuscript handling system has been very positive, and it certainly speeds up manuscript movement and allows tracking of the progress of manuscripts in a way that was almost impossible before. We hope that the new system will significantly speed up turnover times. Of course,

no system is perfect, and we are always happy to receive suggestions as to how things could be improved, both from those involved in the editorial process and from authors who submit manuscripts through the system. I would like to point out, though, that apart from the Managing Editor's position, the entire system works on a voluntary basis and relies on the goodwill of many people. We have had a few belligerent communications from people who are unhappy with the new system but who offer no concrete suggestions for how it could be improved (apart from, perhaps, a return to the good old days of paper and postage). Aside from making the individual involved feel better, such communication does not really help anyone, and I ask people to be considerate of others in their communications. This also applies in the review process—I always tell my graduate students who are about to referee a manuscript to consider how they would feel if they received a sarcastic or put-down review. Too often, they already have—because someone else has seen fit to take advantage of the anonymity of the process to sound off rather than to provide helpful criticism and feedback.

So much for the mechanics of the journal. What of the content and scope? As I mentioned, I think this is an exciting time and Restoration Ecology (both the journal and the discipline) faces many challenges and opportunities in the coming years. Globally, the need for ecological restoration is undoubtedly increasing, but so too is the demand for it. Almost everywhere, restoration projects are being undertaken, from small local activities to state- or region-wide initiatives. It is essential that the science of restoration ecology continues to develop so that it can effectively inform these on-ground activities. It needs simultaneously to strive for scientific excellence and practical relevance. In this regard it is similar to many applied sciences and faces many of the same challenges. The journal, therefore, has to ensure that it fosters both scientific excellence and practical relevance. It has been suggested that *Restoration Ecology* is the academic arm of the ecological restoration literature, with other journals, particularly *Ecological Restoration*, filling the more practical niche. I do not see things quite this way and want material in *Restoration Ecology* to be accessible and useful to practitioners as well as academic scientists.

Part of achieving this is ensuring the readability of material in the journal. Another part is ensuring that articles reporting results from a particular case study or experiment are more broadly relevant to a wide audience. Thus, we will be emphasizing to authors that they need to consider not only the geographic setting, ecosystem type, and particular situation of their study but also its broader relevance to other situations. I think it is essential that we develop this broader perspective so that others can pick up the relevance of individual studies to their particular situation. This benefits not only the broader audience but also the researchers themselves because they can see how their studies fit into a broader perspective. This helps from the more academic perspective too: if restoration ecology is to be a “real” science, it cannot be just a collection of case studies and anecdotes, but there must be cross-over and synergy among studies from different places and ecosystem types. It also helps authors make their articles more likely to be useful and hence more likely to be cited.

Along the same lines, because restoration ecology is still a young and developing science, there is considerable room, and indeed need, for debate and discussion on issues. Although this has happened to a limited extent in the journal up until now (e.g., the discussion between Aronson & Le Floch [1996] and Hobbs & Norton [1996], or more recently Davis & Slobodkin [2004] and Winterhalder et al. [2004]), I would like to encourage more such discussion in the journal. To that end, we aim to initiate an “Opinions” section in the journal, in which discussion pieces can be published, which explore trends and developments in the science, with the aim of pushing debate along. SERI has an active Science and Policy Working Group, which aims to tackle important issues in the field and push the development of the science and which could use this section to float ideas or concepts for broader discussion. In addition, I aim to institute a series of invited reviews from prominent

restoration ecologists, which explore important or emerging issues. This review series should serve not only to provide timely syntheses for researchers and practitioners but also to raise the profile of the journal.

As part of this process, we will also be aiming to explore the boundaries between traditional restoration science and other disciplines. We are currently in a time of flux when traditional or “normal” science is being seen as not sufficient on its own to tackle the complex and pressing environmental problems of today (e.g., Ziman 2000; Gauch 2003). The importance of inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary studies is increasingly emphasized, and the emergence of “postnormal” science as a complementary approach to more traditional methods presents challenges and opportunities, which need wider discussion. What exactly constitutes “good” science means different things to different people, and we need room to explore differing approaches, which may not fit neatly into the standard experimental and observational scientific methodologies. Being prepared for tomorrow’s challenges is as important as tackling those of today.

Part of this is recognizing the need to be broad in our definition of what can be “included” in *Restoration Ecology*. As well as the technical aspects of the discipline, there are many philosophical, social, and other more humanities-based arenas that we need to consider. Inclusion of contributions from such fields may be challenging to more natural science focused researchers but, on the other hand, has the potential to contribute greatly to the conceptual and theoretical development of the discipline. I hope to encourage such contributions in *Restoration Ecology* and to that end have expanded the expertise in these fields on the Editorial Board.

Finally, I hope we can find ways to overcome the fragmentation of disciplines within the broad area of environmental management. Too often, we hear false dichotomies being erected between fields of endeavor, particularly, for instance, between restoration ecology and conservation biology. It seems to me that there is enough to do in today’s world without squabbling over who does what. The fields of general applied ecology, conservation biology, landscape ecology, and restoration ecology, to name but a few, have much to offer one another, and we should really be looking for synergies rather than erecting false partitions.

All this is a tall order, of course! In the end the journal is shaped partly by editorial direction but mostly by the contributions received. I do not expect everyone to agree with all the ideas I have presented here and am happy to receive further ideas, discussion, and argument. My aim is to develop the journal to reflect the dynamic and exciting nature of restoration ecology as it is currently practiced but also to help the science develop and achieve its potential to be a real force in assisting with the repair and better management of the Earth’s ecosystems.

*Richard J. Hobbs*  
*Editor-in-Chief*

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