



Authorship in Ecology

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Authorship in ecology

I read "Authorship in ecology" by JF Weltzin *et al.* (*Front Ecol Environ* 2006; 4(8): 435–41) with much interest. The authors brought up several valid points, of which I felt the most important was not that some codified standard is needed, but rather that discussion about authorship (contributorship) should be open and frequent throughout the research and writing phases. In the end, even an additional "byline", as suggested by the authors, will be subjective. An example is in the paper itself. Can readers of the article clearly distinguish the difference in importance to the end product of "co-developing", "co-refining", and "initiating" the project? My reading of their Panel 1 was that Leigh Williams would have been the lead author, but assuming they followed their own guidelines, their authorship order was determined by an open and deliberative process – something that is much needed in authorship determination and throughout research projects.

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Ensuring that "authors" write

Having authors publish their contributions to a manuscript in a separate byline is a good idea for a variety of reasons (cf Maddox 1994), but in promoting this notion, Weltzin *et al.* (*Front Ecol Environ* 2006; 4[8]: 435–41) still do not identify the means to distinguish study participants as authors versus acknowledged contributors. They in fact add a bit to the authorship/editorship/contributorship conundrum by explicitly identifying their third author as the one who "wrote the first two drafts" of their own article. One would assume that such a contribution would be from the first author. Aside from missing several helpful citations of ecologists (Dickson and Conner 1978; Hunt 1991), including one from ESA

(Schmidt 1987), it appears that Weltzin *et al.* (2006) do not disprove of the notion that some contributors who do not write might be identified as "authors", and might not support the notion that those who contribute most to writing should be considered as the first author. While I agree that the extent of contributions needs to be acknowledged in publication, does not "authorship" connote some actual, original writing? As Mares (1992) proclaimed, "Authorship of a scientific publication is not a reward for having assisted in some way, however trivial, in making a research report possible"; rather, it should identify actual participation in the production of the manuscript. Of the many guidelines available to help sort out this issue, all but those including actual authorship can be used to identify who is asked to help co-author, or even take the lead in writing, an article, but then co-authors should ensure that each truly deserves the appellation. Those who can't or choose not to write should be acknowledged.

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- Dickson JG and Conner RN. 1978. Guidelines for authorship of scientific articles. *Wild Soc B* 6: 260–61.
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Schmidt RH. 1987. A worksheet for authorship of scientific articles. *B Ecol Soc* 68: 8–10.

The authors reply

The letters from Drs Fisher and Fuller reflect the breadth of opinion as to what constitutes "authorship" in ecology. Interestingly, both responses identified Leigh Williams as the most likely candidate for primary author, based on our contributorship statement (Panel 1). Indeed, this was our original intent; however, like other

ecological research, our article is the product of a multiyear collaboration. The full contributorship byline thus reflects the shifting nature of intellectual and writing contributions within our collaborative group. Open and sometimes difficult conversations were required over the course of the project, which was initiated during weekly lab-group meetings involving several of the "acknowledges". Ironically, the addition of details leaves the importance of various contributions more open to interpretation. In sum, we agree that our proposed approach offers little in terms of objectivity, let alone insight into byline order. The transparency of this approach, however, reflects its benefits: self-selection, evaluation, and public acknowledgement should produce few contributorship bylines where individual contributions have been minimal.

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Beyond data: reproducible research in ecology and environmental sciences

We applaud Clifford Duke (*Front Ecol Environ* 2006; 4[8]: 395), Crall *et al.* (*Front Ecol Environ* 2006; 4[8]: 414–8), the Ecological Society of America (ESA), the National Science Foundation, and others who have been advocating for greater access to, and better documentation of, ecological and environmental data. Many of the most important questions of our time will require this. However, we feel that in this push to garner greater accessibility to data, full access to the computational methods used to pro-