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Publisher Taylor & Francis

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### Editors' Bulletin

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t784170508>

### *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research*-the Evolution from a Regional Journal to a Research Hub

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<sup>a</sup> Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research,

Online publication date: 23 February 2011

**To cite this Article** Hannerz, Mats(2010) '*Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research*-the Evolution from a Regional Journal to a Research Hub', *Editors' Bulletin*, 6: 2, 51 — 55

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/17521742.2010.516192

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17521742.2010.516192>

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# Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research- the Evolution from a Regional Journal to a Research Hub

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*Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research (SJFR)* has developed from a regional journal with an applied profile, to a publication which receives contributions from forest scientists all over the world. I am in my tenth year as the scientific editor, and am thereby responsible for some of the recent changes, although many of the steps towards making *SJFR* a high-profile scientific journal had already been taken in the 1990s. In this short article, I will share some of my experiences with you.

First, I want to announce that the journal is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. The first issue of *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research* saw the light in 1986. This jubilee will naturally be given attention. The journal board has used its initiative to arrange a jubilee seminar in conjunction with the regular World Congress of IUFRO (International Union of Forest Research Organizations). The congress takes place every five years; the 2010 meeting took place in Seoul, Korea, and took gathered several thousand forest scientists from all over the world (<http://www.iufro2010.com/index.asp>).

The seminar was supplemented with a special jubilee issue of the journal, based on a suggestion from the editorial board (see [www.informaworld.com/SFOR](http://www.informaworld.com/SFOR) for more information). We initially discussed reprinting important past articles. However, we wanted to focus also on the current and future development of the field. The solution was to make an issue

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1752-1742 Online/10/020051-05 © 2010 Taylor & Francis

DOI: 10.1080/17521742.2010.516192

with qualified review articles on important topics that examine the journal's achievements over the last 25 years, and likely future challenges for the next 25 years. The reviews were compiled to a tight schedule, less than five months, but we were able to complete eight excellent reviews covering aspects such as nature conservation, tree planting, forest operations, inventory technology and small-scale forestry.

### Impact Factor – Forest Science is Slow but Durable

Good or not, Impact Factor has become the main measure of scientific impact for a publication series. This metric often factors in the ranking of research institutions or research groups in the never-ending competition for grants.

The Impact Factor for *SJFR* has remained in the range 0.5–0.9 for the last 15 years, but climbed to 1.075 in 2009. The value is still low compared to journals in fields where research advances quickly. For forest science, the question is whether the traditional 2-year Impact Factor is a fair measure. The 'Forestry' category in the 2009 Journal Citation Reports® includes 46 journals, and only four of these have an Impact Factor exceeding 2.000.

Many of the articles in the general forestry journals remain of value to the community for a significant amount of time; this is reflected in *SJFR* by the high cited half-life index of eight years, meaning that an average article is still being cited more than eight years after publication. The Impact Factor window (the first two years following publication) reflects only a minor part of all the citations to the journal. An analysis run on articles published in *SJFR* showed that this period only covered around 10% of all citations.

One example of the "relevance" of the Impact Factor is an article published in 1999. It received no citations in the two following years, but has thereafter been cited 71 times up to 2009. I also found, when studying all articles published in 1997–1999, that about 85% of them were eventually cited within a few years. Therefore, the newly introduced 5-Year Impact Factor may be a better measure for long-lived journals in the Forestry category.<sup>1</sup>

*SJFR* has a 5-Year Impact Factor of 1.582, which gives it a rank of 15 among the 46 journals in the category. Its (2-Year) Impact Factor of 1.075 ranks it at 21 out of 46.

### Finding the Best Articles

The discussion on Impact Factor is one way to approach the important issue of which articles should be selected for publication. The study mentioned above showed that the 15% most cited articles received 50% of the citations given during the Impact Factor window. The 50% most cited received 90% of them. But how can we determine which papers might be amongst these top 15% or 50% during the review stage? This is a delicate task.

In my experience articles with the potential to be highly cited commonly display some of these features:

- Good review articles covering "hot" topics can receive many citations (but not necessarily);
- Remote sensing is the most highly cited topic covered by the journal, but it is otherwise hazardous to rank research subjects. There are good and not-so-good articles in all fields;
- A well-written article with a key message is more attractive to cite.

The text should justify why the article was written, e.g. “the first study of . . .”, and highlight the main finding, e.g. “we could show, for the first time, that . . .”;

- Single-author articles are likely to receive fewer citations than those with many authors;
- An article published early in the year is more likely to be cited within the Impact Factor window, since there is a lag phase after publication before it becomes well known and used by other scientists.

### Has Science Changed?

Describing trends in research may become an article in itself, but I give only some glimpses.

A Scandinavian forest researcher in the 1980s worked mostly with applied topics, and published the results mainly in domestic report series. There was, however, a rapid change in research trends during the last part of the decade which continued into the 1990s. The need to publish internationally and with peer-review became apparent. This trend has continued. Scientists that 15 years ago were happy to publish in any peer-reviewed journal, now strive to publish in as high-ranked a journal as possible. The “dream” for the forest scientist is to be on the front page of *Nature* or *Science*.

I have observed myself that authors are more comfortable today when writing scientific articles, compared to 10 years ago. Junior researchers who make their first contributions have supervisors who are experienced authors themselves. This is different compared to the 1990s, when students’ supervisors could be old professors who had never published in international journals.

Statistics often require editorial scrutiny. I have a sense that statistical packages today make it too easy to execute complex calculations and receive “good-looking” results, without having the insight into the models behind these calculations. *SJFR* usually requires a presentation of the statistical model, preferably with mathematical notation. This is however less common today than 10 years ago.

### Being an Editor

*Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research* has chosen to have one Editor and an Advisory Editorial Board. Other journals use Assistant Editors, or Subject Editors, but the total amount of about 120 submitted manuscripts does not justify these. The Editorial Board makes however an important contribution both by being referees, and by suggesting referees.

When I started off in 2001, we used an out-of-date system with paper copies and surface mail as the main means of communication. The introduction of the electronic submission and reviewing system ScholarOne Manuscripts™ (formerly Manuscript Central) has really brought about a revolution in terms of workload. Much of the administration of manuscripts is now taken care of in the system. The total time dedicated to the editorial work however is still as high, or higher, than before due to more manuscripts. The time that was saved on administration also tends to be occupied by other strategic issues, such as meetings, writing articles and giving lectures. So, I can’t say I work less now as an editor, but ScholarOne Manuscripts™ makes the work hours more demanding.

The journal is controlled by a board with representatives from Taylor &

Francis and the Nordic Forest Research Co-operation Committee (SNS). SNS has, since 1986, been responsible for the scientific quality of the journal, and also publishes a regular newsletter in each issue (News and Views).

The current editorial board is composed of 18 qualified scientists from Europe and North America. During my time as editor, we have arranged three meetings/workshops, which have all been very constructive.

Being an Editor means a lot of work, but also many benefits. The advantage of the broad scientific network is unquestionable, and it is extremely useful for finding new referees, initializing review articles, or searching for help with various issues. An incentive for me to continue in the role, and I guess for most editors, is to be able to learn more and read the most up-to-date information on various topics. Another incentive is being able to help the authors communicate their main results. In general, all authors can improve this task by adopting a more journalistic approach to the writing. A scientific article should naturally be serious and correct, but the Introduction, Abstract and Discussion benefit from a writing style where the main messages are clear and highlighted, not obscured behind a set of exemptions or troublesome syntax.

### The Future

What will the journal look like in five years time? I am convinced that the

journal is still an important player in the forest research arena, but it will not keep its position without combating some challenges.

One of these is the demand for open access. Many research councils, at least in the Nordic countries, require that results are published with open access. This requirement can be met by publishing in open access journals, or by posting the published article in open archives. The open access movement is a challenge for all the conventional publishing houses, but I have no suggestion on how to meet this challenge.

Another challenge is how to maintain or raise the Impact Factor. There is a tendency among forest researchers to be more topic-specific and to publish the best articles in higher-ranked, specialized journals. Despite this trend, I am convinced that there is a need for the broader scope of the traditional forestry journal. Not all articles will be cited immediately, but my prediction is that other measures than the traditional Impact Factor will gain acceptance, thus showing that also the “slow but durable” forestry articles are important for pushing the scientific frontier forwards.

### Note

1. See Cross, Jo (2009) 'New Journal Metrics Make an Impact', *Editors' Bulletin*, 5: 1, 22 – 29 for explanation of these metrics

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