

Editorial

Welcome to Vol. 7 of *LAJAM*. There has not been an editorial among the journal's pages since the inaugural issue back in 2002, but there have been a number of recent developments that merit highlighting. First of all, this is the first volume for which I have had full editorial responsibility and I would like to take the opportunity to introduce myself to the readership in my new role. I have been with *LAJAM* since its inception, first as a member of the Editorial Board, then as an Associate Editor and more recently as the Assistant Editor. As you may know, our previous Editor-in-chief, Dr. Nélio Barros, was ill for most of last year and sadly passed away earlier this year. For this and other reasons the publication schedule of the journal has been increasingly backlogged, and my number one priority since becoming Editor-in-chief in September 2009 has been to put the publication back on track. Last February we published a very delayed Vol. 6, No. 2 for December 2007. Now we bring you Vol. 7 combining Nos. 1 and 2 as a strategy to make up some time. The year of publication of Vol. 7 would have been 2008 but in order to reduce the backlog we decided to include manuscripts received through 2009. For this reason **the year of publication of Vol. 7 is 2009.**

This volume's cover is graced by the vaquita, the most endangered cetacean on the planet, beautifully and accurately illustrated by Uko Gorter, who has kindly allowed us to use it. Many interesting and diverse contributions from all over Latin America are included in this volume, for a total of five articles, ten notes and three short communications. They cover topics such as bycatch (Franco-Trecu *et al.*, Santos and Ditt), ecology (Salvadeo *et al.*), occurrence and distribution (Pacheco *et al.*, Pardo *et al.*, Fraija *et al.*, Bolaños-Jiménez *et al.*, Díaz-Aguirre *et al.*, Flores, Daneri, Palacios-Alfaro), diet (Castelblanco-Martinez *et al.*, Alava and Merlen), parasites, physiology and strandings (Luz Carvalho *et al.*, Mello *et al.*, Pardo *et al.*, Alardo Souto *et al.*), and vaquita photo-identification (Jefferson *et al.*).

Also included in this volume is a revised and expanded set of Instructions for Authors. These new instructions are intended to provide more clarity about the formatting requirements and to inform authors of what to expect throughout the editorial process. A smooth and expeditious manuscript handling will depend to a large extent on authors following these instructions closely. Comments or suggestions to improve them are always welcome. One common problem area for authors is the References section, which requires special attention to the numerous formatting styles. For users of the bibliographic software EndNote, we are providing a template that should help with this task. The template can be downloaded from <solamac.org/LAJAM/lajam1.htm> or it can be requested from the Editor.

With this volume we are also introducing a new board of Associate Editors. At SOLAMAC's last congress in Montevideo (October 2008) it was decided to restructure the board to make it more efficient and streamlined. Nine internationally renowned experts, several of which have been with *LAJAM* for some time, make up the new board. Under the new structure the Associate Editors have full responsibility for the articles they handle. Their primary duties are to secure quality reviews and to ensure a fair and prompt peer-review process. The new Associate Editors have been instructed to uphold the three basic principles of ethics in manuscript handling: impartiality, confidentiality and avoiding conflicts of interest (real or perceived) in the highest regard. They also have received detailed protocols for manuscript handling, which should help maintain uniformity in the editorial process.

Significant changes (and challenges) lie ahead for the journal. Our next priority is to formalize the relationship between *LAJAM* and the two societies that it serves, SOLAMAC and SOMEMMA. Up until now there has only been a loose association and the journal has functioned relatively independently. But the long-term viability of the journal hinges on it being fully incorporated into the two societies. This will require the drafting of new statutes to define the mission and vision statements for the journal, and to specify the duties, office terms and election procedures for the roles of Editor-in-chief, Managing Editor and Associate Editors. Subscriptions, distribution and finances will also need to be addressed. In the coming months we will be working with the officers of the two societies to draft the new statutes and will subsequently put them out for consideration to the general assemblies.

Another priority for the current editorial board will be to transition the journal to online publishing. This is unanimously supported and is a move that makes sense for *LAJAM* for a variety of reasons. First and foremost there is the issue of distribution: postal services in Latin America can be unreliable and at present many members complain that they are not receiving the journal in the mail. Although an initial investment in a secure website would be required, online publication would also eliminate the costs of printing and mailing, which are significant. At present, printing is primarily covered through generous donations from international organizations like Yaqu Pacha, while the cost of mailing is borne in its entirety by Fundação Instituto Oswaldo Cruz in Rio de Janeiro, through an arrangement by our Managing Editor Dr. Salvatore Siciliano. The online system for the journal would provide facilities for manuscript submission and review, and the electronic version would include a DOI (digital object identifier) for each published manuscript. The board will also work on improving indexing and impact factors, as expected from a reputable journal.

I want to close by bringing your attention to the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find reviewers for manuscripts. This is not a problem unique to *LAJAM*; it is a crisis that the world of scientific publishing is currently facing and that is brought about by the multiple pressures placed on today's scientists and academics. Many potential reviewers are simply 'too busy,' while others consider that it is 'not worth their time' given that no tangible reward is received from reviewing. However, for most of us, productivity is measured by our publications and therefore we rely on this system. If we expect journals to handle our manuscripts in an expeditious manner, why not do our part? If you are asked to review by one of our Associate Editors, please respond. And if you agree to review, please complete your assignment and return it promptly.

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Editor-in-chief
Pacific Grove, CA, USA
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¹I wish to thank my employers, the Joint Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research at the Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii and the NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center, for allowing me to undertake this editorial work as part of my duties.