

Participant #6

Field: Paleontology

Rank: Research Fellow

Q: Why did you decide to become a scientist?

A: I guess I had an interest in palaeontology or pre-history from a young age and decided that sort of remained with me throughout my teenage and growing up and started making the decision to take the GESE and A-Levels and ultimately a degree course. So, yeah, I got interested in a very young age and stayed interested with a few key books over the years that kept me focused and aware of the kind of things I could potentially do.

Q: Some people have described scientists as truth seekers. Would you agree with that? Or how would you describe it?

A: I would agree with that partly. I think it varies in different disciplines of science. A lot of paleontologists are interested in as much of truth as in having an appreciation for the these things that have come before, so they're interested in trying to understand the world. And I guess that's to get to the truth as much as actually having all these wonderful beasts in the fossil record and we want to understand them and make these bones go together for instance. So, I guess that's truth seeking but just as much the enthusiasm of actually trying to visualize this past world.

Q: You just used the word enthusiasm. Do you think enthusiasm is a trait of scientists?

A: Yeah, I think so. I think it's a mix of that and putting in hard work. The pay is less than an equivalent job in the private sector, so you have to have desire to reach some sort of answer or to get somewhere, so I think enthusiasm has to be part and parcel. If you aren't enthused about it, you probably should do something else, or rethink what you're doing research wise.

Q: What makes you enthusiastic about palaeontology?

A: I guess trying to get answers or resolve certain questions. So, some of these questions remain dormant or unanswered for hundreds of years, or other things might come up because we've noticed things in the last five to ten years. So, I guess it's trying to find the data and explain some of these past things we've seen, or trying to understand things on a small scale, that are things that enthuse me about palaeontology.

Q: Some people also describe scientists as explorers. Do you agree with that?

A: It definitely describes some people. I don't do that much field work. A lot of paleontologists would think of themselves as explorers, but most of my research that doesn't involve a computer involves going to museums, so there's a little bit of detective work involved sometimes, especially some of the collections I go through are 100 to maybe 150 years old so the documentation is poor, so that sometimes involves a bit of work. But generally I would say that I don't feel myself quite that way.

Q: What do you look for in a journal when deciding where to submit and publish?

A: There's a few things. Issues to do with page lengths will have some bearing. So, if I'm writing a long description of a dinosaur, then I'll be thinking about journals that will allow me to publish whatever I want really. So, that'll come into it. There will be some level of what kind of wide interest there is, am I going to submit this to a pure palaeontology journal or will I try and aim it for a journal that has a slightly wider readership, so that'll come into it. So, if I'm doing something that is quite taxonomic I'll probably think of submitting to the Journal of Palaeontology for that. I would also try to think about if figures could be in color. Those are the main sort of things. I guess I'll leave you to asking the next obvious questions about access and things.

Q: How does impact factor factor into your decision?

A: I would be wary of submitting to a journal right now that doesn't have an impact factor, so one that hasn't been highly referenced yet. After that I'm not too bothered to submit, if it's a paper on a relatively specialist topic I won't be bothered if the journal has an impact factor of 1 or 3. That really doesn't come to my mind much. After that stage to some extent if a paper needs to be longer than four to five pages then I will look for a suitable journal. I guess, end of the day, the difference between---Nature and Science have impact factors that are very high, there are a few journals that I could potentially submit to which have impact factors of around ten, but after that there are a lot of choice. So, it doesn't really matter. It doesn't have a huge impact on where I submit things just as long as it has one.

Q: As a Research Fellow, do you feel a pressure to publish?

A: No one is saying that I have to publish these many papers. I feel like I need to be publishing papers, because that's what my title is at the moment in terms of doing research, so I feel the most obvious output of that is to produce papers. So, I don't really feel pressure as such in terms of someone saying, 'why haven't you published x number yet?' So, I'm relatively relaxed about how it goes, but I've tended to publish roughly the same amount each year since I got to the third year of my PhD and onwards, so I've tried to maintain that level.

Q: Do you feel a pressure to publish in order to move forward in your career?

A: No. I think I publish enough. Quantity wise I think I have no problem. Back to the impact factor issue, I think I could do with a paper like in Nature or Science, because everyone knows what that is when you publish there, but otherwise I think I am publishing a similar amount to my peers and slightly above me, so that doesn't worry me.

Q: So, is it more about maintaining?

A; Maintaining is the key. Maybe a tiny bit more quality over quantity. I'm happy with what I've published, but maybe a bit more focus on the papers that are getting into the higher impact journals.

Q: How much do publications matter in your appraisals?

A: Quite a bit. The last REF that went around. There are other aspects, like teaching, outreach, and visibility of going to conferences and other things. But publications is the most, again based on the fact I'm a research fellow, publications are the most obvious expected outcome.

Q: What role do you think Open Access has for science?

A: I think it has a role. It's good to have this information out there. Most of the papers I've published in the last couple of years have been Open Access either through an Open Access journal or payments. [university] has a fund for that, so I've made use for that. I made use for papers I thought had a wider readership, but perhaps were in relatively specialist journals. So, there were a few papers I didn't make Open Access. I think it is good for people, anyone to access papers, but at the moment I'm not sure that the system necessarily works for everyone. I'm in a university that has very good funding, but another person at another university might struggle to publish Open Access. Most of the journals don't always have waivers or allow waivers, so I think there's some issues there. I'm not going to advocate that everything has to be Open Access. At the moment it's actually very easy to get papers from people. You can contact the person, you can contact a wider audience that can get these papers, so I'm happy to try most of my work Open Access, but I don't think it's a vital aspect to what I do.

Q: You mentioned data. Do you think Open Data should be available?

A: Yeah, definitely. I think papers should always have the data available with it, as much data as possible to actually recreate what's been done. There are lots of ways to have that

available now. Things like Dryad and W___Bank are useful places to have that as well as directly on the journal website, personal websites. I think data should be freely available. I think more and more journals are taking that up, even journals that are being paywalls, their data is generally available to download, I think.

Q: Does Open Access fall into consideration during appraisals or something you feel your department is supportive of?

A: I think it will be. So far I've never had it mentioned to me with Open Access being, in any personal development conversations I've previously had, no one's ever mentioned it in those ones. But now with the next REF cycle needs papers, or at least government funded, needs to be Open Access there have been emails being sent around to everyone in the department about the need for Open Access. But I don't think there has been any general push that it's an important societal benefit. It's just purely, I think, because it's what's required now. But the fact that the department, or the university has that kind of [Open Access publishing] fund has always been known to me since I got here.

Q: You mentioned government funding. Do you feel pressured to publish openly by funding bodies?

A: I guess it's a little pressure to do it. I don't feel pressurized. It's not like they're providing the money to actually publish those papers in those journals, so that's why I don't think the system is quite so good at the moment. They're expecting us, realistically I guess if they don't provide the money they can only really expect us to submit to archiving journals unless your university has the funds. For instance, even the best of these journals are going to charge £1,000 or thereabouts to publish them. And again, [university] has that money but not everywhere does.

Q: Do you feel that it is an unfair requirement when the cost isn't built into the funding?

A: Yes. I think it's a problem. I think the funding bodies are more problematic than universities. The university is basically doing what it has to do to get that funding. I think the funding bodies need to rethink this if they expect us to publish everything Open Access.

Q: Do you think you'd feel differently about Open Access if you were at a less funded university?

A: Yeah, definitely. I wouldn't have access to the journals, so that might come into it a bit more, but then it's very easy to get papers from co-authors. For instance, there are papers that aren't even out yet, but I have a copy because I've emailed the authors about it. It's easy

enough in that regard. It's also quite nice to click on a tab and get a paper. I'm the same way with publishing something. If I didn't have the funding from [university], I guess then I would need to rethink the papers I'm publishing if I wanted them to be in the REF eventually. I'd also have to think about Open Access, at least archiving them.

Q: As a scientist, what makes you want to support Open Access?

A: It's definitely good that more people can access a paper. Both from getting more citations, but also for the fact that someone in a small university can get these papers and do good work from them. So, I think that's useful. I review papers from colleagues from all around the world. In China I see papers that haven't cited anything after 2005 or so. I think part of that is that they haven't necessarily had access to papers or have been slow to actually getting them. Having all those papers available to everyone via an internet feed is definitely a good thing. So regarding that Open Access is excellent.

Q: When you got your first publication, how did it make you feel?

A: Great. -laughs- It was a nice moment. It wasn't Open Access, I gotta say! It felt fantastic. It was really nice to see everything formatted in that particular way and looking like a real paper.

Q: Do you feel your status as a scientist changed after your first publication?

A: Yeah, I guess so. It means you actually are a professional rather than---guess you could argue that someone that hasn't published yet, amateur's not the right word, but you're not yet producing anything yourself yet and obviously PhDs and students are building up to these kind of things, but until you've actually published something then you aren't contributed anything in the public domain. So, in that regard, it was definitely a good feeling. I could then publish more things and people could treat them more seriously seeing that I had a basis to what I was saying.

Q: How did it feel the first time you were cited?

A: I guess it felt good. I can't remember what the first citation was, but it definitely felt nice that someone else was reading my paper and thought it was relevant to their research. It felt like I had a place in the world. I don't think I knew the author, so it was kind of nice in that regard.

Q: Do you feel your value as a scientist is based on your publications?

A: Yes. I think almost entirely really. As a scientist I think that is one of the few measures that people can decide your worth. Maybe as a lecturer you can be evaluated more on your

teaching and your other contributions, but I think in journals are the main sort of beacon that we use to measure if someone is contributing.

Q: How do you feel your colleagues evaluate you as a scientist?

A: I guess publications and the quality of those publications. Probably citations less so. If you published a very high impact paper this year it may have no or few citations, so I guess it's more about the actual publications themselves. Quantity, quality, some sort of combination of those two. So, within the field or department, giving talks at conferences or within the department. So, people will evaluate you based on if what you're saying is interesting, do it make sense, is it applicable beyond palaeontology.

Q: What motivates you to publish?

A: To see my name in big stars, no. -laughs- On one aspect it means you've at least drawn a line over a piece of research that you've decided that this is enough to say what you think the answer is for this particular contribution, or I think I've resolved this particular issue or at least to the level I can so far based on the data we have. It's the expectation that publishing is what you do. I can't say anyone has ever drilled this into me, but that's what we do as scientists, we do research, we publish it. If you don't do that, then there's the kind of publish or peril thing, and someone else will eventually do it and you'll regret never having published it yourself.