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Curbing academic predators: *JoTT*'s policy regarding citation of publications from predatory journals

Rajeev Raghavan [1], Neelesh Dahanukar [2] & Sanjay Molur [3]

[1] Conservation Research Group (CRG), St. Albert's College, Banerji Road, Kochi, Kerala 682018, India
[2] Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), G1 Block, Dr. Homi Bhabha Road, Pashan, Pune, Maharashtra 411008, India.
[3] Founder & Chief Editor, *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, Wildlife Information Liaison Development (WILD) Society, 96 Kumudham Nagar, Vilankurichi Road, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641035, India
[1,2,3] Zoo Outreach Organization (ZOO), 96 Kumudham Nagar, Vilankurichi Road, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641035, India
[1] rajeev@zooreach.org, [2] n.dahanukar@iiserpune.ac.in, [3] sanjay@zooreach.org

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Predatory journals—fake, scam, unscholarly and deceptive journals—that compromise the peer review procedure and require authors to 'pay-to-publish', apparently the only criteria for publication, have largely been discredited by the global scientific community (Beall 2012; Butler 2013; Bohanon 2013; Bartholomew 2014; Raghavan et al. 2014; Clark 2015; Lakhotia 2015). Yet, predatory journals continue to be used by hundreds of researchers in developing countries. Young scholars who can easily be deceived by misleading metrics, inspiring journal titles and quick acceptance and publishing times, are especially at high risk; though it is not uncommon to see experienced academics and researchers using predatory outlets to publish their work (Beall 2012, 2015a; Raghavan et al. 2014; Kearney & The Inane Predatory Publishing Practices Collaborative 2015; Xia et al. 2015). With the continuous rise in the number of predatory journals, and associated dubious publications replete with unreliable information and scientific misconduct (Beall 2012, 2015a; Butler 2013; Bartholomew 2014; Raghavan et al. 2014), there is a need to initiate a collaborative effort towards curbing the growth and spread of this scientific plague (Caplan 2015; Clark & Smith 2015).

Predatory publications are polluting Indian academia (Foster & Chopra 2012; Raju 2013; Raghavan et al. 2014; Lakhotia 2015), as Indian authors are one of the world's leading contributors to predatory journals (Xia et al. 2015), and the country houses the major share of the world's predatory publishers (Bohanon 2013; Xia et al. 2015). One way of fighting this issue is to make potential authors aware of the problem of predatory publications, and simultaneously setting a firm journal policy against publishing in predatory journals. In this editorial, we make the reader and prospective authors understand the general nature of the problem and set *Journal of Threatened Taxa*'s policy regarding citation of work published in predatory journals.

While a number of glaring examples, from all different fields of science, are now available to understand the effects of predatory publications, we wish to restrict our discussion on examples that fall within the aims and scope of the *Journal of Threatened Taxa* (JoTT). In particular, we provide examples from the field of aquatic sciences and from within India.

India has a long and productive history of aquatic science related research, and scientists in the country have been credited with pioneering research outputs in the subject area (Silas 2003). However, of late, the quality of aquatic science research in the country has been affected by a spate of poor (see Smith-Vaniz & Carpenter 2015) and unethical publications (see Raghavan et al. 2013), including those that make use of predatory journals (see Raghavan et al. 2014). This

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is severely affecting the scientific discipline in general and the genuine workers in the field, in particular. The focus is clearly on 'quantity', largely a result of the introduction (and lack of clarity) of the academic performance indicator (API) scheme by the University Grants Commission (Raju 2013), rather than the 'quality' of publication (Lakhotia 2015). There is an overwhelming influence amongst academics in Indian universities to publish in 'impact factor' journals and many apparently use the deceptive metrics in predatory journals to boost their 'impact'. The misplaced evaluation system based on impact factor forces many academicians and researchers to publish in 'easy' and 'rapid' predatory journals with self-proclaiming deceptive metrics (C. Srinivasulu, Osmania University, pers. comm. August 2014).

While it is true that the intention of authors to get rapid publications—so as to boost their curriculum vitae and without the fear of rejection through peer review—is a driving force towards increase in the number of predatory publishers, an unsuspecting author can become a prey just because of sheer ignorance in the matter. Out of the many ways in which predatory publishers lure authors in publication, an offer to publish paper rapidly (within a few hours or days) is no way advantageous for the author. A rapid publication is a definite indication that the peer review is compromised, and in this way, the author will never learn about errors/issues in the manuscript. Further, the easy online availability of flawed papers decreases the reputation of the author in the larger scientific community.

Another popular way in which the authors are lured to publish in predatory journals is the offer to join the editorial board (most predatory journals invite authors who publish with them to subsequently serve on their editorial board). Scientists from leading research organizations and university departments in India dealing with aquatic sciences regularly publish papers in predatory journals, as well as serve on their editorial boards. For example, the *International Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Studies* (www.fisheriesjournal.com), a predatory journal charging INR 1500 for a paper, has academics representing four State Agricultural Universities (under the Indian Council for Agricultural Research/ICAR) and a Central University serving as editorial board members. This journal is one of the most popular predatory outlets for aquatic science research with close to 200 papers (of a total of around 400) published by Indian ichthyologists since it began operations in the year 2013. Although this journal does not provide a publisher name on the website, a Google search of the 'contact us' address reveals the names of several other predatory journals operating from the same address. It remains to be understood if researchers submit papers to such journals and others remain on the editorial board because of their ignorance and lack of awareness on the issue, or knowingly support such unscientific publications in order to make quick and short-term gains. Either way, they disrupt the principles of academic integrity.

There are high chances that young scholars as well as early-career researchers are increasingly being misled by the presence of academics/scientists with affiliations to leading research organizations and universities in India on the editorial board of predatory journals. We wish to inform young scholars that an invitation to the editorial board of predatory journals is in no way related to academic recognition and/or reputation, but simply a deceptive strategy to coax authors.

JoTT supports best practices in scientific research and writing. As a journal that is keen to support young scholars and help them publish quality scientific papers, it is important that *JoTT* provides awareness on the issue of predatory publishing to its current and prospective authors, many of whom are early-career researchers. As subject editors for papers in *JoTT*, we are concerned by the increasing number of manuscripts submitted to the journal that cite predatory publications. To make prospective authors aware of this issue, and disseminate *JoTT*'s policies against unscholarly publishing, we provide the following guidelines regarding the citation of work from predatory journals.

(1) *JoTT* discourages citation of work published in journals from any of the known predatory publishers or stand-alone predatory/deceptive journals. For all practical purposes, we suggest that authors refer to the list of publishers and list of stand-alone journals at www.scholarlyoa.com (Beall 2015a).
(2) *JoTT* discourages citation of work from journals that are not yet listed in Beall (2015a) but fulfil the criteria set by Beall (2015b).
(3) If the author must cite the work published in a predatory journal, as it is important in the study, they should cite it in the text as 'published in a predatory journal' (since JoTT does not trust that such work was published following scientific procedure of peer review). For instance, "..... was suggested by Author et al. (published in a predatory journal)" or "..... was suggested (Author et al., published in a predatory journal)".
(4) Although *JoTT* does not consider work published in

predatory journals as scientifically valid, authors are advised not to reproduce the content of such work as a whole or in part in *JoTT* as all such frauds will be considered scientific misconducts of the form 'plagiarism'. Such accusations will be objectively analyzed and penalized appropriately as stated in an earlier JoTT Editorial on policy (Dahanukar & Molur 2012).

(5) JoTT understands the limitations of the present listing of predatory publications by Beall (2015a) as applied to only open-access journals, and will include predatory/deceptive subscription or toll-access journals as identified by other systematic and authentic evaluators.

To curb the growth and spread of predatory publishing, a severe threat to scholarly publications, is a shared responsibility of all academicians and researchers. There is a growing list of publications addressing this problem in both the scientific and popular media. We request readers to read the articles referred in this editorial and the references therein to understand the severity of the matter and unite in the fight against unethical practices of predatory publishers.

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