



<https://doi.org/10.11646/megataxa.10.2.1>

<http://zoobank.org/urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:0B85164F-07B2-46AD-8CDE-A3F75618BD2B>

A decade of Biotaxa.org: community-supported online library for taxonomic journals enhanced their publication, access and preservation

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Abstract

Biotaxa.org is a non-profit international collaboration among professional societies, institutions, publishers, natural history museums and libraries for facilitating the publication, enhancing the access and enabling the preservation of journals in biological taxonomy. Since the start of Biotaxa.org in 2013, 58 journals by 46 publishers from 23 countries have joined this platform and 49 of these journals archived 10,076 issues covering a span of 98 years (1926 to 2023). Most of these journals (41) are for open access. Currently 13 journals are also using Biotaxa.org site for manuscript submission and review. Biotaxa.org has helped small publishers and journals—many of these lack sufficient funding—go online, reduce cost, become more sustainable, remain editorial independent, and/or be archived to fulfil the requirements of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature.

Key words: taxonomic publication, archiving, online submission and review

Introduction

Despite claims to the contrary, taxonomy is flourishing in some aspects, and it needs to be able to provide the evidence supporting the wondrous biodiversity on Earth, and how humans are extinguishing it (Costello *et al.* 2013a). A tantalisingly near complete inventory of 2.2 million named species was published last year (Costello *et al.* 2022) and 88 % of 1,134 biologists who participated in a survey by Lien *et al.* (2022) supported a more coordinated and managed global list of all species. About 18,000 new species are named every year, including a few thousand from fossils and about two thousand marine species (Costello *et al.* 2013b, Bouchet *et al.* 2023). Popular media share the excitement of new species discoveries, indicating that the public expect scientists to discover species. Indeed, in both the Bible and Quran, “man” was told to name

species and tell people their names, while the Sikh holy scriptures estimated 8.4 million may exist (Costello 2020). The fact that new species discoveries are highly correlated with the number of named species across taxa (Costello *et al.* 2013b) and are typically found where most known species occur (Bouchet *et al.* 2023), indicates we now have a representative sample of life on Earth.

New species discoveries continue to be made by both amateurs and professionals in hundreds of books and journals (Bouchet *et al.* 2016, Fontaine *et al.* 2012). While gathering this knowledge is greatly aided for digital publications in the last few decades, and for pre-1923 publications which have been digitised by the Biodiversity Heritage Library, many publications have not been digitised and can be difficult to access. Moreover, a particular challenge for many journals with perhaps only a few issues per year and no full-time staff, has been a lack of access to low cost online publication systems, both with respect to editorial processing of papers submitted for review, and appropriate digital archiving to comply with the requirements of codes of nomenclatures for validity of online-only publication and the new species names therein (International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, 1999, 2012). Biotaxa.org was established in 2013 to address these gaps by forming a collective platform for the electronic publication of journals in the field of taxonomy, including digital archiving back-issues.

About Biotaxa.org

Biotaxa.org is a non-profit international collaboration among professional societies, institutions, publishers, natural history museums and libraries for facilitating the publication, enhancing the access and enabling the preservation of journals in biological taxonomy. Biotaxa.org also provides a publishing platform and online hosting for member publishers. Using Open Journal Systems (OJS), journal editors of participating publishers can have authors submit manuscripts online using a manuscript submission

and tracking within OJS, which considerably eases the entire process of online publication, including peer-review and editorial decisions. By aggregating many taxonomic journals in a single cross-searching system, Biotaxa.org defragments the current taxonomic publishing landscape and thus increases the visibility and impact of taxonomic journals.

Biotaxa.org serves as a third-party digital archive (ICZN-approved and ZooBank-enabled) for taxonomic journals, enabling e-only publication of nomenclatural acts in taxonomic journals and preserving them for future generations. Participating journals may also make their content available through other online systems. Preference is given to journals publishing current content. Biotaxa.org encourages the participation of open-access journals but can also host journals with subscriber access. Biotaxa.org advocates the use of the international standard PDF/A to preserve the fixed content and layout of participating journals.

Through international collaboration and sharing of resources and expertise, Biotaxa.org reduces duplication of efforts and enables small societies and independent publishers and their journals to benefit from the economy of scale. Biotaxa.org is sustained by member contributions: financial or in-kind, and managed by representatives from member organisations.

Biotaxa.org is not a publisher; it is a consortium of publishers and functions as a non-profit member-supported organization. Each participating publisher or journal retains its identity and copyright, and is responsible for editorial decisions and policies, subscription policies and processing of current contents and open-access policies (immediate

open-access or delayed open-access). For publishers that opt for delayed open access, they must provide Biotaxa.org permanent or irrevocable licence to make the work accessible should they no longer do so before copyright expires.

Biotaxa.org is currently managed by its co-founders: Mark John Costello and Zhi-Qiang Zhang. It is open to all taxonomic journals or other biodiversity journals related to taxonomy. Publishers who wish to join Biotaxa.org should contact Dr Zhi-Qiang Zhang (to whom a membership form may also be requested). Currently there is no membership fee. Members can contribute in-kind support to Biotaxa.org.

History of Biotaxa.org

The initial idea behind Biotaxa.org was first envisaged in 2010 during a dialogue between Dr Zhang and Dr Costello (then Chair of the Council for the Society for the Management of Electronic Biodiversity Data) about the need to archive Zootaxa and other journals, and to build linkages between Zootaxa and databases, after Zootaxa became the largest journal in taxonomy. The idea was further developed at “the 3rd Meeting Scientific Publishing in Natural History Institutions” held at the Natural History Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen in 2010. With the support of Ward Appeltans and Hernandez Francisco of The Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), OJS was installed on a VLIZ server and tested in 2011. The idea about “developing a non-profit international facility that will integrate cost-efficient online publishing and permanent digital archiving for all taxonomic publications” was formally mentioned in Zhang (2011: 6). The name

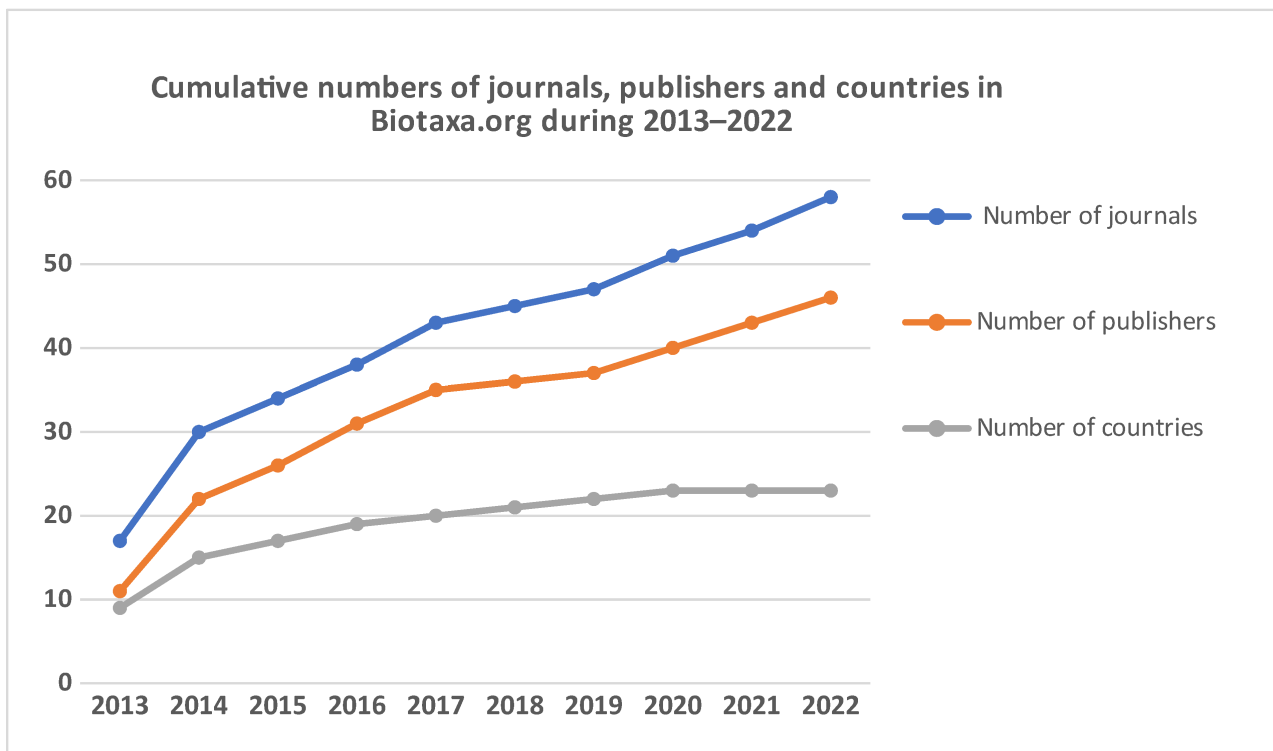


FIGURE 1. The growth of members in Biotaxa.org over the ten years as shown by the increasing number of journals, publishers and countries.

Biotaxa was first made public by Zhi-Qiang Zhang in August 2011 during a public seminar at the School of Environment, The University of Auckland. The seminar was followed by discussions with supportive colleagues from the University of Auckland including the Faculty of Science, Centre for eResearch, Library and School of Biological Sciences. In 2012, Biotaxa.org went online on a server hosted by the Centre for eResearch at The University of Auckland. In early January 2013, Biotaxa.org formally started with the archiving of the online editions of two journals (*Zootaxa* and *Phytotaxa*) from its founding member Magnolia Press and another journal (*Systematic & Applied Acarology*) from another founding member (Systematic & Applied Acarology Society) in PDF/A.

Growth in its first decade

Since the start of Biotaxa.org in 2013, 58 journals by 46 publishers from 23 countries have joined (Table 1). Just over half of these journals joined during the first two years and the growth in journals, publishers and countries has continued with no signs of reaching a plateau (Fig. 1).

The distribution of journals among countries sees just over half of the countries having one journal and the top three countries accounting for 38% of all the journals (Fig. 2). The distribution of journals among publishers is similarly uneven with 93% of the publishers contributing to one journal each but the top publisher from New Zealand alone contributing to 10 journals (or 22% of all the journals) (Table 1).

Improved access, publication, and preservation

Of the 58 journals, 33 are published both online and in print and 17 are online-only; the remaining eight journals were published in print before but made available online (Table 1). Of 41 open access journals (76% of all member journals), 22 are Gold open access and 21 are platinum or diamond open access (no fee charged to author); 11 are hybrid journals and only four are subscription journals (Table 2). Except for nine journals, 49 journals archived 10,076 issues covering a span of 98 years (1926 to 2023).

OJS comes with manuscript submission and review capability, which was offered to our member journals free of charge. Currently 13 journals are using Biotaxa.org site for manuscript submission and review. This increases the efficiency in editorial processing of papers submitted for review in these journals.

Discussion

The world of scientific publishing has seen the growth of massive online only journals, and merger of publishers into a few who dominate the market and determine the prices that authors and readers pay to publish/read. Because they set the price, and every journal and paper are unique, the market does not saturate, and so competition does not lead to reduced costs to authors or readers, or debates over value-for-money. This is despite that the bulk of the salaries of authors and other research costs are paid by the taxpayer through government funding, and institutional policies typically require the use of “preferred (discounted) service

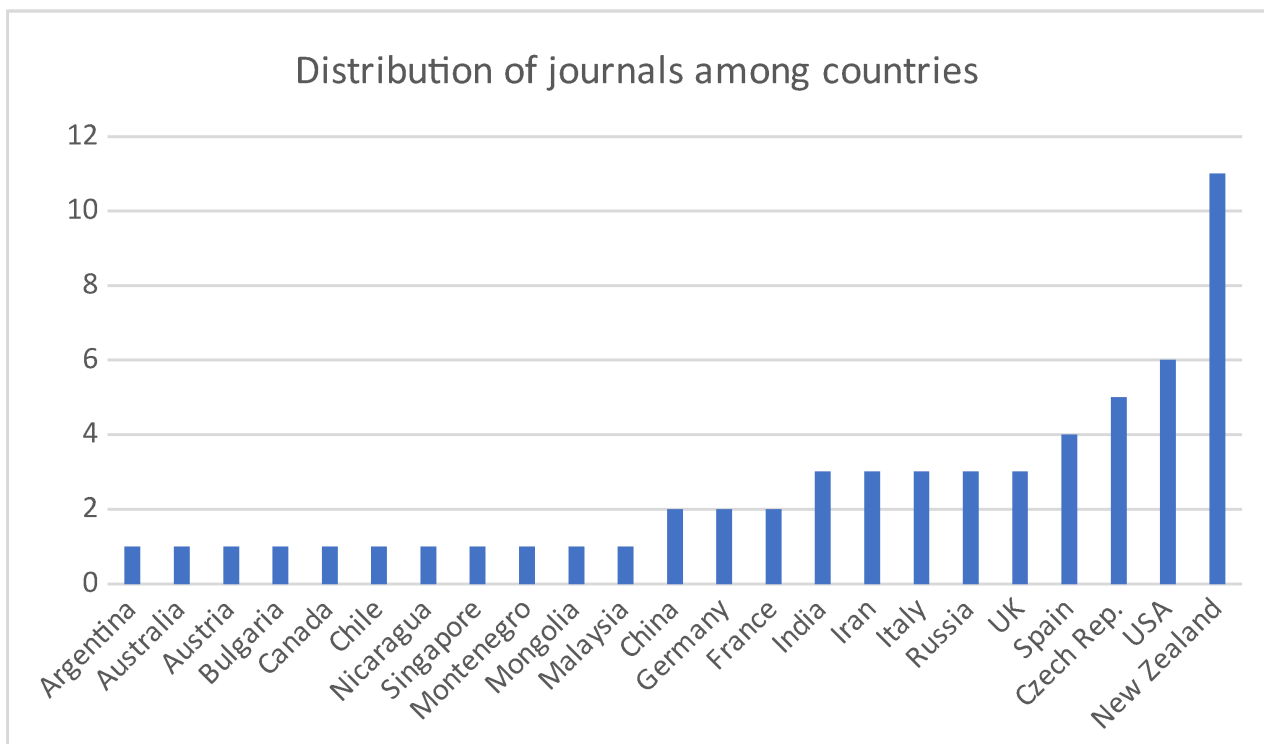


FIGURE 2. The distribution of journals in Biotaxa.org among countries.

providers”, obtaining “alternative quotations” and reviews of staffing to reduce costs. This situation means that those authors and readers without institutional funding will publish in either Platinum open-access or subscriber-funded journals (including hybrid journals). This is a significant community for taxonomists, with about 50,000 people describing species in recent decades (Costello *et al.* 2013a) and an estimated 60 % of people involved in writing new species descriptions not having institutional addresses (Bouchet *et al.* 2023). Hundreds of taxonomists are also collaborating to publish open-access databases on species nomenclature, traits and associated literature (e.g., Costello *et al.* 2018, 2022). A parallel initiative to Biotaxa.org, also using OJS and Platinum open-access, is the European Journal of Taxonomy (Benichou *et al.* 2012). Such efforts, and Biotaxa.org, demonstrate that the taxonomic community is making efforts to coordinate open access and low cost online publications of species descriptions and associated information to advance primary knowledge of life on Earth and aid quality assurance in the use of species names in science and environmental management.

Our overview of the history and development of Biotaxa.org over the last ten years shows that it has helped small publishers and journals—many of these lack sufficient funding—go online, reduce cost, achieve better sustainability, remain editorially independent, and/or be archived to fulfil the requirements of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature. It is a significant achievement to have over 10,000 issues from 49 journals archived in Biotaxa.org with only voluntary contributions from members. It is known that two of the founding journals (*Zootaxa* and *Systematic and Applied Acarology*) are among the top-10 journals in the numbers of new taxa published: the former accounts for 26.6% and the latter 0.8% of all new taxa indexed in *Zoological Record* from 2015 to 2020 (Zhang 2021). It is unknown how many new taxa are included in other journals archived in Biotaxa.org. It will be an interesting future project to find if journals in Biotaxa.org account for over 50% of the new taxa described each year.

Acknowledgements

This Biotaxa.org website is hosted by Faculty of Science, The University of Auckland. Technical support is provided by the editorial office of *Zootaxa* at Magnolia Press. The domain name was initially registered and managed on behalf of Biotaxa.org by the Data Centre of The Flanders Marine Institute and now by the Faculty of Science, The University of Auckland.

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TABLE 1. The journals who joined Biotaxa.org, showing their ISSNs, names and country of publisher and year joined.

Journal name	Online ISSN	Print ISSN	Publisher	Country	Year joined
<i>Acta Entomologica Musei Nationalis Pragae</i>	1804-6487	0374-1036	National Museum, Prague	Czech Republic	2013
<i>Alytes</i>	2999-9162	0753-4973	International Society for the Study and Conservation of Amphibians	France	2016
<i>Amurian Zoological Journal</i>	2686-9519		Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia	Russia	2021
<i>Arquivos Entomológicos</i>	1989-6581		Arquivos Entomológicos	Nicaragua	2014
<i>Asian Journal of Conservation Biology</i>	2278-7666		TCRP Foundatio	India	2020
<i>Biodiversity Journal</i>	2039-0408	2039-0394	Edizioni Danaus	Italy	2020
<i>Bionomina</i>	1179-7657	1179-7649	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2013
<i>Bollettino Malacologico</i>	2420-7780	0394-7149	Società Italiana di Malacologia	Italy	2022
<i>Bryophyte Diversity and Evolution</i>	2381-9685	2381-9677	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2014
<i>Bulletin of Phylogenetic Nomenclature</i>	2815-9241	2815-9233	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2022
<i>Bulletin of the Florida Museum of Natural History</i>	2373-9991	0071-6154	Florida Museum of Natural History	USA	2017
<i>Bulletin of the Russian Far East Malacological Society</i>		1560-8425	Russian Far East Malacological Society	Russia	2017
<i>Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature</i>	2507-0570	0007-5167	International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature	Singapore	2015
<i>Institució Catalana d'Història Natural</i>	2013-3987	1133-6889	Institució Catalana d'Història Natural	Spain	2021
<i>Canadian Journal of Arthropod Identification</i>	1911-2173		Entomological Society of Canada	Canada	2014
<i>Caribbean Herpetology</i>	2333-2468		Privately Published	USA	2014
<i>Check List</i>	1809-127X		Pensoft	Bulgaria	2014
<i>Dumerilia</i>		1256-7779	Society of the Friends of the Laboratory of Herpetology of the Paris Museum	France	2016
<i>Ecologica Montenegrina</i>	2336-9744	2337-0173	Institute for Biodiversity and Ecology	Montenegro	2014
<i>Elytron</i>	2014-623X	0214-1353	Asociación Europea de Coleopterología	Spain	2014
<i>Entomotaxonomia</i>		2095-8609	Entomotaxonomia	China	2017
<i>European Journal of Entomology</i>	1802-8829	1210-5759	Institute of Entomology, Czech Academy of Sciences	Czech Rep.	2015
<i>Euscorpius</i>	1536-9307	1536-9293	Privately Published	USA	2013
<i>Fauna of New Zealand</i>	1179-7193	0111-5383	Manaaki Whenua-Landcare Research	New Zealand	2013
<i>FishTaxa</i>	2458-942X		Privately Published	Iran	2016

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TABLE 1. (Continued)

Journal name	Online ISSN	Print ISSN	Publisher	Country	Year joined
<i>Folia Parasitologica</i>	1803-6465	0015-5683	Institute of Parasitology, Biology Centre of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Czech Rep.	2015
<i>Forktail</i>		0950-1746	Oriental Bird Club	UK	2013
<i>Fossil Imprint</i>	2533-4069	2533-4050	Národní Muzeum	Czech Rep.	2014
<i>Herpetology Notes</i>	2071-5773		Societas Europaea Herpetologica	Germany	2014
<i>Holotipus</i>	2704-7547		Matteo Grasso	Italy	2019
<i>International Journal of Odonatology</i>	2159-6719	1388-7890	Worldwide Dragonfly Association (Wachholtz Verlag)	Germany	2022
<i>Journal of Caribbean Ornithology</i>	1544-4953		BirdsCaribbean	USA	2021
<i>Journal of Insect Biodiversity</i>	2147-7612	2538-1318	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2018
<i>Journal of Insect Biodiversity and Systematics</i>	2423-8112		Tarbiat Modares University in collaboration of the Entomological Society of Iran	Iran	2022
<i>Journal of The National Museum (Prague), Natural History Series</i>	1802-6850	1802-6842	National Museum, Prague	Czech Rep.	2013
<i>Journal of Threatened Taxa</i>	0974-7907	0974-7893	Wildlife Information Liaison Development	India	2014
<i>Megataxa</i>	2703-3090	2703-3082	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2020
<i>Mesoamerican Herpetology</i>	2373-0951		Eagle Mountain Publishing, LC	USA	2014
<i>Molluscan Research</i>		1323-5818	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2013
<i>Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences</i>	2225-4994	1684-3908	National University of Mongolia	Mongolia	2016
<i>Monografías electrónicas SEA</i>		2386-5318	Sociedad Entomológica Aragonesa	Spain	2017
<i>Myrmecological News</i>	1997-3500	1994-4136	Austrian Society of Entomofaunistics	Austria	2018
<i>New Zealand Entomologist</i>	1179-3430	0077-9962	Taylor & Francis	Australia	2013
<i>Palaeoentomology</i>	2624-2834	2624-2826	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2019
<i>Persian Journal of Acarology</i>	2251-8169		Acarological Society of Iran	Iran	2014
<i>Phytotaxa</i>	1179-3163	1179-3155	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2013
<i>Prommalia</i>	2320-4311		ENVIS Centre on Faunal Diversity, Zoological Survey of India	India	2013
<i>Revista Chilena de Entomología</i>	0718-8994	0034-740X	Sociedad Chilena de Entomología	Chile	2017
<i>Revista de la Sociedad Entomológica Argentina</i>	1851-7471		Sociedad Entomológica Argentina	Argentina	2013
<i>Revista gaditana de Entomología</i>	2172-2595		Un entomólogo andaluz	Spain	2013

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TABLE 1. (Continued)

Journal name	Online ISSN	Print ISSN	Publisher	Country	Year joined
<i>Ruthenica, Russian Malacological Journal</i>	2307-7336	0136-0027	A.N.Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution of RAS	Russia	2013
<i>Sherbornia</i>	2373-7697		Privately Published	USA	2014
<i>Systematic and Applied Acarology</i>	2056-6069	1362-1971	Systematic and Applied Acarology Society	UK	2013
<i>Systematic and Applied Acarology Special Publications</i>		1461-0183	Systematic and Applied Acarology Society	UK	2013
<i>Treubia</i>	2337-876X	0082-6340	Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense	Malaysia	2020
<i>Zoological Systematics</i>		2095-6827	Institute of Zoology, Chinese Acad. Sci.	China	2015
<i>Zoosymposia</i>	1178-9913	1178-9905	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2013
<i>Zootaxa</i>	1175-5334	1175-5326	Magnolia Press	New Zealand	2013

TABLE 2. Journals in Biotaxa.org: publication model, years and issues archived and use of Biotaxa.org for manuscript submission and review. Platinum = platinum open access which requires no fee from authors; Gold = gold open access which requires fees from authors; Hybrid = some papers are open access.

Journal name	Publication model	Year archived	Issues archived	Submission, review
<i>Acta Entomologica Musei Nationalis Pragae</i>	Platinum	2014–2023	24	No
<i>Alytes</i>	Gold	2012–2021	12	Yes
<i>Amurian Zoological Journal</i>	Platinum	2009–2023	59	Yes
<i>Arquivos Entomológicos</i>	Platinum	2009–2014	10	No
<i>Asian Journal of Conservation Biology</i>	Gold	2015–2023	18	Yes
<i>Biodiversity Journal</i>	Gold	2020–2023	13	No
<i>Bionomina</i>	Hybrid	2010–2023	35	No
<i>Bollettino Malacologico</i>	Subscription	2022–2023	6	No
<i>Bryophyte Diversity and Evolution</i>	Hybrid	1989–2023	49	Yes
<i>Bulletin of Phylogenetic Nomenclature</i>	Gold	2022–2023	2	No
<i>Bulletin of the Florida Museum of Natural History</i>	Gold		0	No
<i>Bulletin of the Russian Far East Malacological Society</i>	Platinum	1997–2019	13	No
<i>Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature</i>	Platinum	2008–2022	48	No
<i>Butlletí de la Institució Catalana d'Història Natural</i>	Hybrid	2021–2023	14	No
<i>Canadian Journal of Arthropod Identification</i>	Platinum	2015	3	No
<i>Caribbean Herpetology</i>	Platinum		0	No
<i>Check List</i>	Gold	2005–2017	59	No
<i>Dumerilia</i>	Subscription		0	No
<i>Ecologica Montenegrina</i>	Gold	2014–2023	76	Yes
<i>Elytron</i>	Subscription	2014–2016	3	No
<i>Entomotaxonomia</i>	Gold		0	No
<i>European Journal of Entomology</i>	Gold	2017–2023	8	No
<i>Euscorpius</i>	Platinum	2013–2018	119	No
<i>Fauna of New Zealand</i>	Platinum	1982–2023	82	No
<i>FishTaxa</i>	Platinum	2016–2020	15	No
<i>Folia Parasitologica</i>	Gold	2015–2023	9	No

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TABLE 2. (Continued)

Journal name	Publication model	Year archived	Issues archived	Submission, review
<i>Forktail</i>	Gold	2013	1	No
<i>Fossil Imprint</i>	Platinum	2021–2023	5	No
<i>Herpetology Notes</i>	Gold	2014–2023	10	Yes
<i>Holotipus</i>	Platinum	2020–2023	4	No
<i>International Journal of Odonatology</i>	Gold	2022–2023	2	No
<i>Journal of Caribbean Ornithology</i>	Gold		0	No
<i>Journal of Insect Biodiversity</i>	Hybrid	2013–2023	174	No
<i>Journal of Insect Biodiversity and Systematics</i>	Platinum	2015–2023	34	Yes
<i>Journal of The National Museum (Prague), Natural History Series</i>	Subscription		0	No
<i>Journal of Threatened Taxa</i>	Gold		0	No
<i>Megataxa</i>	Gold	2010–2023	13	No
<i>Mesoamerican Herpetology</i>	Platinum		0	No
<i>Molluscan Research</i>	Hybrid	2005–2012	24	No
<i>Mongolian Journal of Biological Sciences</i>	Platinum	2003–2023	29	Yes
<i>Monografías electrónicas SEA</i>	Gold	2015–2017	2	No
<i>Myrmecological News</i>	Gold	2018–2023	6	Yes
<i>New Zealand Entomologist</i>	Hybrid	2013	1	No
<i>Palaeoentomology</i>	Hybrid	2009–2023	31	No
<i>Persian Journal of Acarology</i>	Platinum	2012–2023	48	Yes
<i>Phytotaxa</i>	Hybrid	2009–2023	1464	No
<i>Prommalia</i>	Gold	2013–2015	3	No
<i>Revista Chilena de Entomología</i>	Platinum	2018–2023	24	Yes
<i>Revista de la Sociedad Entomológica Argentina</i>	Platinum	1926–2023	161	Yes
<i>Revista gaditana de Entomología</i>	Gold	2010–2020	12	No
<i>Ruthenica, Russian Malacological Journal</i>	Platinum	2009–2023	47	No
<i>Sherbornia</i>	Platinum	2014	1	No
<i>Systematic and Applied Acarology</i>	Hybrid	1996–2023	142	Yes

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TABLE 2. (Continued)

Journal name	Publication model	Year archived	Issues archived	Submission, review
<i>Systematic and Applied Acarology</i> <i>Special Publications</i>	Gold	1997–2009	23	No
<i>Treubia</i>	Platinum		0	No
<i>Zoological Systematics</i>	Gold	2016	1	No
<i>Zoosymposia</i>	Hybrid	2008–2023	24	No
<i>Zootaxa</i>	Hybrid	2001–2023	7113	No