



EDITORIAL COMMENT

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With this issue comes the first 'Newsletter'. It is not a new development for the HAA. The original 'Journal' of the Herpetological Association of Rhodesia (our forerunner) was just that. Its aim was to encourage contact and the exchange of information between anyone with an interest in the study and conservation of the African herpetofauna. A similar philosophy initiated the first HAA Journal in 1965. It was "... not intended to be a medium for the publication of scientific papers and it should not be quoted in the literature".

This has changed. The 'Journal' has evolved into a viable outlet for scientific observation. It is abstracted by many major journals, e.g. Zoological Record, Biological Abstracts, Herpetological Review, etc, and quoted in individual scientific publications. However, if the contents of the 'Journal' are to be considered valid scientific observations, they must meet certain standards. Articles must be refereed by competent authorities to ensure that the data is original, previous work duly acknowledged, and conclusions logically based. This has been recent editorial practice, but it has not been stated as a specific policy.

There are certain consequences of adopting a policy of "peer review". Any changes advocated in a manuscript by the referee have to be accepted by the author, and checked during publication. There is an inevitable delay in publication. This is exasperated by the slow rate of submission of articles to the 'Journal'. Printing costs have escalated dramatically, and publication of the 'Journal' must await the accumulation of sufficient contributions to make printing economical. News items, i.e. forthcoming conferences, new books, job vacancies, etc, are therefore delayed, and are often out of date by the time of publication.

Certain regular items, e.g. members' requests, membership lists, change of address, etc, could also be printed in a cheaper format. For these reasons a separate 'Newsletter' has been initiated. It will be xeroxed and posted bi-monthly by surface mail to reduce postal charges. All items will be printed as submitted, the editor maintaining only brevity and grammar. It is for your use and members are encouraged to submit items that they think will interest, inform or simply amuse their fellow herpetologists.

Articles submitted for inclusion in the 'Journal' will be subject to 'peer review'. In the event of disagreement between author(s) and referee(s), both will be given the opportunity to state their views.

This issue is the first that I have supervised. Its delay is unfortunate, especially coming at the same time as an increase in subscriptions. Members are entitled to wonder whether they are getting value for money. Although the delay is occasioned in part by my inexperience, the main problem is the lack of articles. The 'Journal' is only as large or as good as its content. It needs the support of the herpetological community.