

Guidelines for dealing with predatory publications

- **By Prof. Nick Vink**

When members of AEASA act on behalf of the Association, they have to deal with predatory Journals in two settings:

1. When they publish in Agrekon, or when they review articles for Agrekon,
2. When they serve on the various Awards Committees, whether it be for publications or for theses.

The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist them in managing this process to ensure that AEASA does not encourage publication in predatory Journals.

Academic publications in Journals are found in two different forms:

1. Journal managed by established, mainstream Journal publishers such as Oxford University Press, Wiley, Taylor and Francis, Springer, Elsevier etc. These publishers sell bundles of Journals to research libraries world-wide and restrict access to the material to subscribers. In certain cases an author can pay (typically up to \$5000 and more) to have their article "opened" to all comers. Some Journals are published in this form by scholarly Associations, where access is for members only (as was the case with Agrekon until 2010) but there are very few of these remaining.
2. Open access publishing. Here there are two variants: free access with no charges to authors or users (AfJARE is a prime example); and free access with charges to users (e.g. IFAMR).

This latter variant has unfortunately been hi-jacked by predatory Publishers who typically short-circuit the peer review process and basically sell space in their Journals, typically charging up to \$3000 **per article** published, although the asking price seems to have gone down recently. What they typically do is push anything from 25 to 150 Journals on to the market, then they milk the Internet to find cooperative Editors, Editorial Boards and reviewers, and gullible authors who are prepared to pay the price to see their articles published. The peer review process can take anything from a few days to at most two weeks, compared to 3 months to a year for mainstream Journals. Once a Journal can't find sufficient authors to pay the publication fees it is closed down. When sufficient of the Journals are in this situation the Publisher vanishes off the Internet and is invariably recreated with a different name by the same people.

This is not a particular problem for developing countries: Canada and Switzerland are well known launching pads for these publishers, as are some East European and Asian countries. It is a truly global phenomenon.

Unfortunately some of the main Bibliographic service providers (Clarivate, Scopus, IBSS) have placed some of these Journals on their lists of accredited Journals without effective due diligence. Don't be fooled by this!

How does one deal with the problem? **The first thing to remember** is that this is a fairly recent phenomenon: in 2011 there were only some 25-30 such publishers, in 2016 more than 900, with an expected doubling in 2016 – but, fortunately, signs of a levelling off and even decline by 2020. In our field it is virtually only the Journal of Human Ecology that predates 2010. **The second thing to remember** is that reputable Journals expect authors to access the best and the latest articles in their specific field in order to establish explicitly the contribution they are making to the literature. With these two perspectives in mind, users (authors, reviewers, etc.) are advised to do the following:

1. Concentrate on publications after 2010, which is when this really started becoming a problem
2. Look at the title of the Journal. Some are so stupid as to be almost bizarre. Why, after all, would anyone include the following in a Journal title (these are all real examples):
 - Nonsensical juxtapositions: The Global American Journal...
 - Heroic titles: The... Journal for Basic and Applied Science... or even better The Global Journal of Advanced Research!
 - The obvious: any Journal with 'Contemporary' or 'Current' in the title, e.g. Current Research Journal of Social Science. Research is not research if it is not contemporary or current!
 - Overreach: The Journal of Social Issues and Humanities, or The Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences or the Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Sciences!
 - Stupid juxtapositions: The International Journal of Agriculture and Crop Sciences (crop sciences are part of agriculture)
 - Grammar mistakes in the title: International Journal of *Advance* Research and Innovation
 - Know the journals in your field: Take, for example, the Journal of Development and Agricultural Economics. Apart from a silly name, who has ever heard of it?
3. Of course, a silly name is no guarantee that a Journal is from a predatory publisher. So the next thing to look for is the name of the Publisher. Many Journals hide this information, but the advice here is to keep on searching until you find it – sometimes in the fine print at the bottom of the website, sometimes in the email address in the "Contacts" area of the website, etc. And when you do find it and you don't recognize it, beware!
4. Another potential giveaway is the Editorial Board – the presence of a name from a well-known University gives comfort, although one must beware, because

there are instances where the name of a scholar is put up there without their consent or knowledge.

5. Any promises of an expedited review process must be regarded with suspicion. This is a difficult issue lately, because some of the best Journals in the world are promising expedited review, either in the Journal itself, or in an offshoot Journal (Science Direct, for example, insists that reviewers complete their review within two weeks).
6. Article processing charges are a tell-tale sign of predatory practices – you pay, we publish – especially when coupled with expedited review. After all, the publisher stands to lose if the article is rejected. Unfortunately, many of the mainstream publishers have now climbed on this particular bandwagon, so that this is no longer a sure sign.
7. Beall's List used to give comfort to Journal Editors around the world, but Beall ceased updating his list in early 2017. His lists were updated regularly by different anonymous persons/groups for some years, but these websites have now all vanished. The best one can do these days is to use your common sense, aided by this check-list to help make future decision making easier: <http://thinkchecksubmit.org/>
8. In the end you the author have to decide whether you are going to use a citation.
The best advice you can get is: when in doubt, don't use it.

One citation of a predatory Journal in an article, monograph or thesis/dissertation can be considered as a mistake. More than one means the authors are wittingly or unwittingly aiding and abetting this practice and should be (politely) asked not to do it again. **But our Association can only be successful if we don't give prizes to, or publish articles, that contain citations to work published in predatory Journals. Our Association should also make authors of these works who are members of AEASA aware of the pitfalls that come with publishing in them and discourage them from doing so.**