

Synthesis paper guidelines

Synthesis papers aim to provide a balanced, comprehensive and concise overview of a well-established laboratory/field study system, network or project, targeted at a broad ecological audience. We particularly encourage papers on systems that have proved controversial or where our understanding of them has radically changed over time as new methods or approaches have developed. Synthesis papers should not only be useful up-to-date resources for academic researchers and practitioners, but they could also serve as valuable teaching resources. As such, they should be written in an engaging way for a broad ecological audience, with minimal assumptions about specialist ecological or system-specific knowledge.

Specifications

Synthesis papers should be within the usual word count of 8,500 words for all *Journal of Animal Ecology* papers, but we will consider longer papers if justified.

A standard Synthesis paper could include the following sections and address the following questions:

- A numbered Summary.
- An Introduction that clearly outlines the main ecological question(s) that the synthesis tackles.
- A brief outline of the historical context of the study in relation to the topic addressed: who have been the key players, and what were their roles?
- A brief outline of the key attributes of the study system, network and/or species.
- What have been the key methodological, theoretical and/or scientific advances that have aided the scientific research?
- What is the current thinking and has a consensus been reached?
- What are the unanswered questions and how might they be tackled?
- What are the key technical and/or logistical constraints and how likely is it that they will be resolved?
- A Discussion or Conclusion that clearly summarises why this long-term study system has proven to be successful (or not) in addressing a key ecological question, and that identifies the general lessons that can be learned from such long-term studies.

- We are not expecting any new data or models to be included, but where they are they must conform to standard *Journal of Animal Ecology* Data Accessibility guidelines.

Example paper

Martínez-Padilla, J., Redpath, S. M., Zeineddine, M., Mougeot, F. (2014), [Insights into population ecology from long-term studies of red grouse *Lagopus lagopus scoticus*](#). *Journal of Animal Ecology*, 83: 85–98.

Guidance for reviewers

Synthesis papers should clearly set out the important ecological question(s) that the system/network/approach addresses and highlight why the specific system has facilitated a greater understanding of broader ecological theory. They should provide a balanced view of the particular study system or project and should clearly identify areas where the authors' views are at odds with those of others working in the field. They should be written in an accessible style, suitable for a non-specialist graduate-level audience and provide some historical context to the study. The format is deliberately kept flexible to reflect the diversity of different systems and approaches we wish to encourage, but all Synthesis papers should include a numbered Summary, an Introduction and a Discussion or Conclusion. We expect authors to address as many of the questions outlined above as is feasible.