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The *Irish Naturalists' Journal* 1925-2025, a century of natural history publishing in Ireland

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The Irish Naturalists' Journal was established in 1925 as a successor to The Irish Naturalist (1892-1924). Throughout its history the INJ has been open to amateur enthusiasts and professionally trained scientists. It has been run for a century on a voluntary basis with members drawn from various sectors of the Irish natural history community. Over 8,800 individual contributions have been published within the INJ covers and the Journal's 15 occasional publications.

INTRODUCTION

The *Irish Naturalists' Journal* (INJ) was established by a group that met on 29 May 1925. The meeting was called to deal with the demise of *The Irish Naturalist* (IN) in 1924 (Kertland 1978). The history of *The Irish Naturalist* has been detailed by Wyse Jackson and Wyse Jackson (1992) who explained the decline of IN resulted from a combination of factors. Printing costs caused financial difficulties which had been kept at bay by the personal funds of Richard Manliffe Barrington (1849-1915), but his death ended this essential support. Changes to the civil and public service following Irish independence saw many professionals heading to Britain. This included IN Editor and driving force George Herbert Carpenter (1865-1939), who left Dublin for a post in Manchester in 1922. When the IN ceased publication, there was no shortage of potential content from amateur and professional naturalists and there remained a thirst for a replacement journal.

The meeting in May 1925 was held at the 'Old Museum' on College Square in Belfast. This was the home from 1831 of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society (founded 1821) who had transferred their collections to Belfast Corporation in 1910 to join the Belfast Municipal Museum, later incorporated into the Ulster Museum, now part of National Museums Northern Ireland. The INJ Archive in the National Museum of Ireland houses the original Minute Book with notes from the event. The meeting was attended by twelve men as delegates of natural history societies comprising:

Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society (BHNPS)

Belfast Naturalists' Field Club (BNFC)
Dublin Naturalists' Field Club (DNFC)

The representatives were recorded as Professor [W.B.] Morton, W.H. Workman (BNHPS); Rev. W.R. Megaw, Mr A.A. Campbell, Mr D.J. Carpenter, Mr A.McI. Cleland, Mr W.M. Crawford, Mr S.A. Bennett, Mr J. Skillen, Mr J.A.S. Stendall and Mr R.J. Welch (BNFC); and Mr A.W. Stelfox (DNFC). They decided to establish a journal and to structure the committee in a way to ensure permanent representation from those three organisations, with "such other societies as shall be from time to time invited participate in the management", followed by a list:

Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society
Belfast Naturalists' Field Club
Cork Scientific and Medical Society
Dublin Naturalists' Field Club
Route Naturalists' Field Club
Dublin Microscopical Club (ceased operations in 1926)
Royal Zoological Society of Ireland
Botanical Society of Northern Ireland

They had canvassed support in advance with a note in the final issue of IN and were able to report guarantees of £172 based on a subscriber base of 258, comprising 176 ordinary and 82 teachers. The formal title of the journal was initially set as "The Irish Naturalists' Journal: a Magazine of Natural History, Antiquities and Ethnology".

The papers of Andrew Bonaparte-Wyse (1870-1940) are preserved in the National Library of Ireland. His brother Lionel Bonaparte-Wyse (1874-1955) was an entomologist and in letters to Andrew, he lamented the downfall of *The Irish*

Naturalist.

“My article has not yet appeared in the *Irish Naturalist* but it may do so next month. I received the proofs some time ago and returned them duly corrected. The magazine is in a bad way and has lost its principal editor Dr G.H. Carpenter of the Royal Irish College of Science which institution, I believe, is at present in a precarious condition. Mr C.B. Moffat who is well disposed to me, is taking Carpenter’s place.” (January 1923).

In another letter in April 1927, Lionel is writing about an upcoming trip to Waterford and comments:

“Also I expect to continue my entomological pursuits and perhaps make some interesting discoveries to be embodied in the new “*Irish Naturalists’ Journal*” which has replaced the old “*Ir. Naturalist*” but not advantageously.”

The organisation was founded in May 1925 and in September the first issue of the new journal emerged in print with J.A. Sidney Stendall as Editor-in-Chief. The cover records that it was “Published by ‘Irish Naturalists’ Journal’ Committee, Belfast” with printing by The Northern Whig Ltd., a commercial arrangement that was to last for many decades until that company ceased trading in 2012. The first issue of INJ included an editorial that bemoaned “Societies which still carry on good work, but with a woeful lack of co-operation among their own members and with those of kindred bodies.” (Stendall 1925a). The solution was identified as

a “living publication appearing so frequently as to prove of use to all.” They expressed concern that the subscriber base would need to improve significantly if a regular and rich magazine were to develop. The committee’s stated aim was to have an issue every two months, comprising at least 20 pages of text, with plates when desirable and affordable.

From the first issue, the Editor was using “I.N.J.” to refer to the journal and it is commonly referred to as INJ in many published articles and common usage since. The initial cover design owed much to the IN but was a larger print format (Fig. 1). It was designed by Newton H. Penprase (1888-1978) from Cornwall, a teacher in the College of Technology, College Square, Belfast (Stendall 1925b). Early articles included general short summaries from each discipline, authored by members of the INJ Committee for the most part, but with some specific short notes or ‘siftings’ by well-known naturalists of the time. This suggests a canvass for submissions to get the first issue off to a good start with varied content. There was even a page for children, with an explanation of the elephant’s trunk, and some book reviews.

Despite the expense, the first issue includes a photographic plate of *Helix* shell necklaces produced in Bundoran, Co. Donegal by “old peasant women”, along with examples of the shells used. The article (Welch 1925) demonstrates the connection between zoology, ethnology of a living craft, and supposed connection to archaeological examples from nearby Sligo. This diversity of subject matter was maintained for many

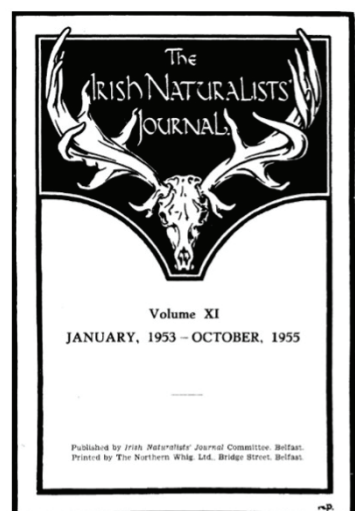
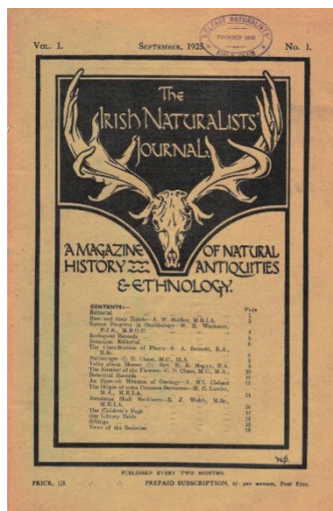
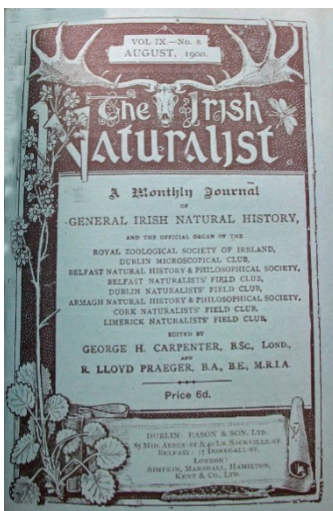


Figure 1. Sample covers of (left to right): *The Irish Naturalist* (1900), the first *Irish Naturalists’ Journal* design by Newton Penprase (1925), and simplified version by Andrew Scott (1955).

years, but archaeology and ethnology declined sharply with the revival of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* in 1938 (Weatherup 1973) and was dropped formally in 1948 (Stendall 1948a) when the focus moved to botany, geology and zoology as it remains today.

Initial volumes comprised short articles that were criticised by some readers for not going into sufficient depth for their personal interests (Stendall 1925c). This was defended by the Editor as being the intention of the committee. The diversity of articles was important, and in an issue of 20 pages, only a couple of pages could be afforded to each article. In addition, there were book reviews, news of the various societies, the children's page, obituaries and short notes of a few lines to accommodate.

By 1926 a decision had been taken to formalise the INJ structures, and a set of Rules was published in the May issue (*INJ* 1: 108). Each of the Societies listed above was to pay ten shillings per 50 members, up to a maximum of three pounds. Their representation was based on the number of members in each organisation. Annual subscription was set at six shillings. It was decided to have twelve issues comprising a volume, so that meant that a single volume ran

over several years. After the first twelve months it was possible to report 484 subscribers, a number maintained for several years that kept finances on track.

IRISH FIELD CLUBS

The Irish Naturalist and the *Irish Naturalists' Journal* owed their origins and a great deal of their success to the field club movement. This took off in 1863 with the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club (Campbell 1938) followed some years later by Dublin (1885-1886), Cork (1892) and Limerick (1892) (Praeger 1894). When it commenced publication in 1892, *The Irish Naturalist* was described by its founders as a place where "observers in all branches of Natural History ... have a means of comparing notes, and making known to the public the results of their work" and claimed that no journal of this kind existed in the country (Carpenter and Praeger 1892). Primarily an initiative of the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club, the editors noted the formal support of the Royal Zoological Society of Ireland, the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society, Belfast Naturalists' Field Club, Dublin Microscopical Club, Armagh Natural History



Figure 2. Members of Belfast Naturalists' Field Club on 11 June 1868 at The Honeycomb, Giant's Causeway, Co. Antrim. Published in *INJ* in 1959 (Volume 13(1), plate 2). Photo: Mr Marck of Coleraine. Courtesy of BNFC Archive.

and Philosophical Society, and Cork Naturalists' Field Club. These organisations were listed on the title page where it was declared that *The Irish Naturalist* was the "official organ" of these societies.

Praeger (1892) outlined the origins and nature of the various Irish regional field clubs. They were very much a popular movement, initiated in Belfast by a series of public lectures by Ralph Tate on behalf of the state Department of Science & Art. Discussion in newspapers between letter writers stimulated the formation of Belfast Naturalists' Field Club with over 100 members (Fig. 2). As with some other clubs and societies, they had produced their own publications from time to time. The establishment of *The Irish Naturalist* coordinated this enthusiasm and ensured a reliable production schedule and financial security. Activities were a mix of field excursions and evening meetings, and membership was a broad mix of amateur enthusiasts and professionals from state bodies and academia.

By the 1980s, there were a dozen active field clubs in Northern Ireland and about five in the Republic of Ireland (Meenan 1983). That was from a total of 43 organisations in the north and 28 in the south that covered natural history more generally, indicating a healthy level of general public interest.

The revival of *The Irish Naturalist* as the *Irish Naturalists' Journal* in 1925 was evidently driven by the same field clubs and scientific organisations active 30 years earlier. INJ remains the 'official organ' of the remaining field clubs, and although it has changed over many decades there is still open encouragement of submissions from amateurs. In recent years, this has been evidenced by a rise in digital macrophotography and the popularity of social media in bringing those with an interest in wildlife together with experts in species identification. The more significant discoveries have made it into publication in INJ, which is often the first time many authors would have submitted to a scientific journal.

CHANGING CONTENT OF INJ

The early issues of INJ reflect the target audience. It was important to be a magazine with regular bi-monthly publication showing diversity in each issue. INJ Committee minutes record the discussions around the need to be attractive to teachers in schools, be affordable, and authoritative. The Editorial Committee started out with experts in each group, many of whom wrote the short articles, or acted as referees for submissions. The issue of formal peer review arose at an early stage with an archaeological

submission that challenged the "heterodoxy" in relation to inscriptions on stone of a passage tomb at Knockmany, Co. Tyrone. As part of the review process, the author's entry in Who's Who was read out to the committee. Despite the significance of the author, it was decided to add "The Committee does not accept responsibility for the opinions contained therein" and to send it to two noted archaeologists for review, as long as the author was agreeable. Suffice it to say that a century later the peer review process is rather different!

In the 1930s, the INJ was still aiming to have diverse content in each of the six issues per year. This caused articles to be held over as the funds only allowed for a certain number of pages per issue. There were fewer commissioned articles, and more open submissions found space at the expense of the Children's Page and other less urgent sections. The Editor was able to describe the INJ as "a family affair, the members of which are spread not alone over Ireland, but far and wide. No profit is sought except that which comes of knowledge" (Stendall 1935).

INJ has changed significantly in content since the early issues and the general articles by Editorial Committee members were replaced by an increasing number of submissions on aspects of natural history from a diversity of authors. There was a marked change in the landscape for professional scientists in Ireland during the mid-twentieth century. Partition had a significant impact, with the lack of funding available to the new Free State seeing a drop off in staffing at many institutions in the south (Whyte 1999). There was a recovery and numbers grew, with many new names appearing as authors in INJ from the 1930s. Things were not much better north of the border where initially "police stations were erected instead of museums and art galleries" (Evans 1968, p. 4). Despite the political splits, the INJ has always been notable in remaining focused on the importance of publishing on Ireland's natural history, north and south. From the 1930s, meetings were held alternately in Belfast and Dublin, a practice that continued until the 2020 Covid-19 lockdowns when most meetings moved online.

The costs of publication were a regular topic of concern and reflected in many editorials. The subscriber base of around 450 remained fairly consistent through the 1920s and allowed for 600-750 copies of each issue to be printed and circulated. The surplus of up to 300 copies went to free distribution, to field clubs, schools, and a small number in exchange with similar societies overseas. Photographic plates were an additional cost, with production of a coloured example priced at £10, for which sponsorship was received

from individuals and the Royal Irish Academy. Eileen Barnes (Lucey 2012) was paid by INJ for a watercolour drawing of the Irish Lady's-tresses orchid to illustrate a paper by Matilda Knowles (1928, plate 1) (Fig. 3).

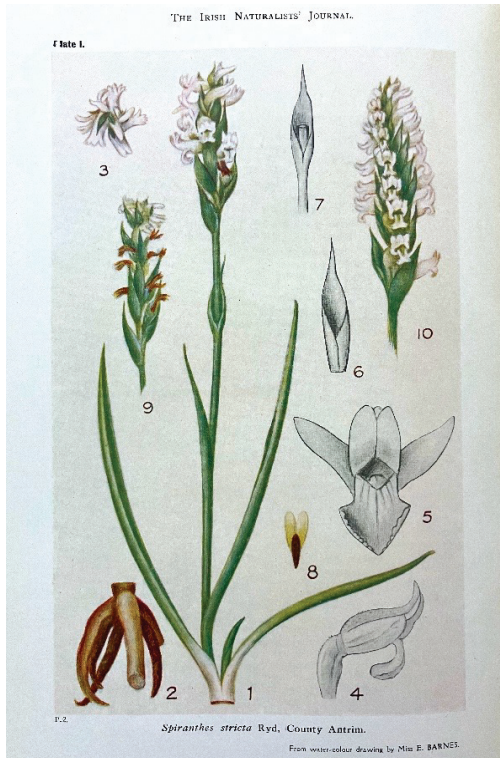


Figure 3. Colour plate from 1928 with Irish Lady's-tresses orchid (now *Spiranthes romanzoffiana* Cham.).

INJ set out to develop a project to monitor annual variations in biological responses to climate in a Phenological Survey, which commenced with a call for records to be sent to Arthur Stelfox (Stendall 1927). While primarily botanical, faunal records were included, even the 'first cuckoo' which has become a classic of Irish newspapers since (Moffat *et al.* 1928). There was a hiatus in the war years when travel was restricted and postal correspondence between neutral south and Belfast was subject to censorship, but the survey returned in strength in 1947 (Brunkner 1947) but by 1948 it was formally discontinued (Stendall 1948b).

Editorials under Stendall were a regular feature of each issue, introducing the content, with many comments on events of the day, from details of the comings and goings of field clubs and similar societies, and notes on wildlife conservation. When he retired in 1949, the very short reign of John (Jack) Heslop-Harrison was followed by Patricia (Pat) Kertland (Linton

1977). She reduced Editorials but still used them occasionally to lobby for issues of conservation concern, as in the call to action following a startling loss of the National Trust's estate in Devon for a motorway (Kertland 1969). More significant was the general change in focus of INJ to scientific submissions and reviews, with much less in terms of commissioned articles of a general nature. It became more of a scientific journal and less of a natural history magazine but retained reports from field clubs and its reviews section. Funding was a concern through the 1980s and while subscription rates were increased, and grant-awarding bodies pushed for support, it was felt necessary to charge institutional authors for articles exceeding five pages in length. Sponsorship of volumes by a bank, an electricity provider, then a forestry body kept the finances healthy.

Since its inception, INJ has published over 8,850 articles. These range from very short notes and editorials, to substantial papers. There have been six Editors (Table 1), supported by over forty Assistant and Sectional Editors. Less visible have been the considerable number of anonymous referees, as with all INJ efforts, entirely on a voluntary basis. INJ pays for typesetting and printing services, but everything else is done without charge and in the interests of bringing science into print on behalf of the authors and readership. The promotion of the activities and publications saw a website online from 2011 that linked to a bibliography of content hosted by National Museums Northern Ireland as part of their Irish Natural History Literature online searchable database. This public profile of INJ has been assisted greatly by online access to content through JSTOR, making the journal and occasional publications more visible internationally.

Table 1. Editors of the Irish Naturalists' Journal.

Editor	Years Active
Jesse A.S. Stendall	1925-1949
John 'Jack' Heslop-Harrison	1950
M. Patricia H. Kertland	1951-1976
Elizabeth A. Platts	1976-1988
Robin Govier	1988-2012
Nigel T. Monaghan	2012-present

OCCASIONAL PUBLICATIONS

INJ has been responsible for 15 occasional publications to date. The first of these standalone volumes was an index compiled by a committee

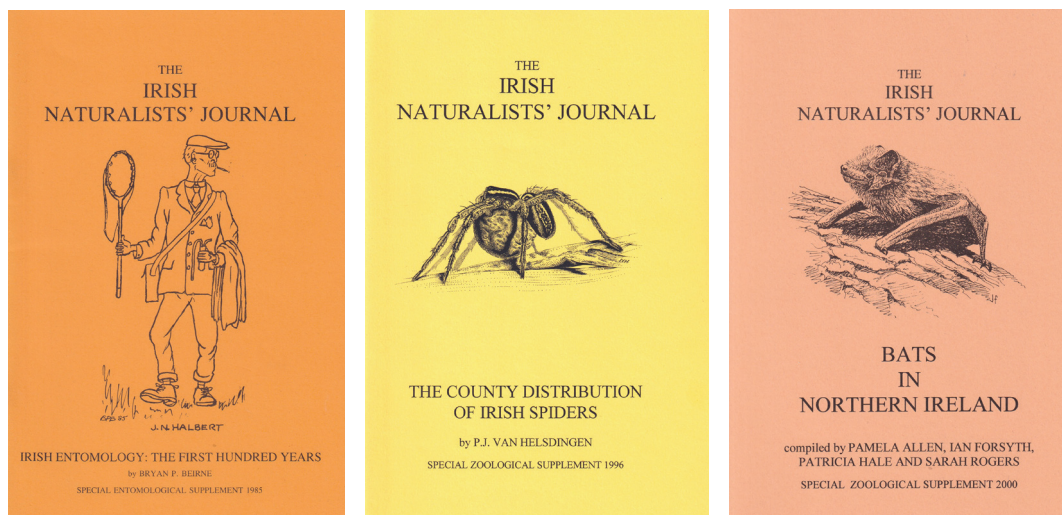


Figure 4. Covers of INJ Occasional Publications –1985, 1996, 2000.

led by R.D. and J.W. Fitzgerald who managed the card index used (Kertland 1961). It includes over 10,000 entries from the first twelve volumes of INJ, detailing all mentions of species of animals or plants, with many taxonomic updates for cross-reference (INJ Committee 1964). The next two volumes were issued in 1972 as a compilation of summary bibliographies of articles in many journals on aspects of Irish geology, which INJ had published in instalments between 1937 and 1971 (Charlesworth 1972a, 1972b).

Subsequent volumes have been on specific aspects of Irish natural history, including bats, spiders, beetles, Lough Neagh, marine turtles, and collections of papers from conferences (Fig. 4). Occasional Publications of INJ today go through the same peer review process as all other submissions. They are also expected to be self-financing and fall within the range of INJ subject matter.

PRODUCTION OF THE *IRISH NATURALISTS' JOURNAL*

The Editor was allowed to buy a typewriter in 1930, but up to that date the copy sent to the printer would have been handwritten. Typesetting and printing by the Northern Whig in Belfast resulted in a lot of printing blocks as one was made for each illustration or photograph. These were held by the printers but lost in 1941 when Belfast was bombed during WW2 (Kertland 1978), described by the Editor who had to apologise for the delay as “our printers received not inconsiderable attention from night flying enemy bombers who liquidated not only the issue, but a fair portion of the works as well” (Stendall 1940). The relationship with the Northern Whig was

so supportive that the retirement of its manager was marked in 1985 (Kertland 1985). One key print block was the cover, which was revived in a more simple style by Andrew Scott (Fig. 1). The cover was redesigned in 1968 (Kertland 1968), and again in 1998 (Govier 1998). For the latter, a full colour photograph of Lough Melvin by Robin Govier marked the sponsorship of ESB and less obviously showed the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland running through the middle of a lake. After the sponsorship of that volume ended, the pale green cover returned with a set of four rotating sketches by artist Raymond Piper.

Volume 20 in 1980 saw a change from letterpress to offset lithography (Platts 1979). The mechanics of production remained unchanged into the period of Robin Govier, who as Editor was still working with typeset galley proofs in the 1980s (Monaghan 2013). This made corrections in proof expensive, most images in halftone only, and a word count that worked out as more costly than today. The costs were brought under control in 1998 when the Editor took on typesetting combined with a change of printer (Govier 1998).

The change to full colour production from Volume 29 in September 2008 was part of a major overhaul of the production process and the design of INJ (Fig. 5). The design by Juanita Browne was funded by the Heritage Council as was the computer, software and printer to allow the Editor to do the typesetting. From 1938 the INJ was issued quarterly, with 12 issues over three years comprising a volume and all advertising was dropped (Stendall 1938), each volume being issued with a title page and index once completed.



Figure 5. INJ covers following redesign in 2008.

From 2008, indexing of each volume was dropped and the standard 12-part volume changed to two parts per year, and again in 2021 from Volume 38 to a single volume per annum. At that time, the Editor alone was relied upon to do everything from receiving all submissions (in typescript, on disc or by email), arranging for review of papers, typesetting on PC, and print management. This changed from 2012 and the editorial team now comprises an Editor responsible for managing submissions, arranging commercial typesetting and printing, while eight Sectional Editors are responsible for the review process.

IRISH SCIENTIFIC PERIODICALS

Herries Davies (1978) in his review of geological publications identified the year 1787 as the foundation of the first Irish scientific periodical in the form of the *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*. Since then, there have been a number of scientific periodicals with Irish natural history content. For geology alone, he identified 23 titles as containing articles of relevance, with botany and zoology added, the figure must be much higher. Of those 23 titles that included geology, INJ is one of only four still in production. The lesson is that many journals come and go depending on the desire from authors to see their work in print, combined with the demand from a readership through subscription or libraries. The demise of many titles can leave a great number of articles accessible only in a small number of libraries, particularly where there is no legacy organisation to produce listings, indexes or digitise articles.

The Royal Irish Academy (RIA) periodicals

have gone through several title changes since 1787, but they are still at the forefront of Irish natural history publishing and all content is hosted online by JSTOR. The Royal Dublin Society (RDS) has a long pedigree, with the first formal publication *Transactions of the Royal Dublin Society* in 1799, with various titles active up to 1985 when they ceased production. A full bibliography of all RDS titles was published in book form (Mollan 1987) and fortunately this index and all of their periodical content are available free online (RDS 2025).

Few new journals have commenced in recent decades, the most relevant to INJ audiences is probably the *Bulletin of the Irish Biogeographical Society* (O'Connor 2025). This was founded in 1975 as a repository for articles on aspects of Irish biodiversity, particularly those with a lot of data, and the 625 articles to date are augmented by almost 20 occasional publications including substantial species checklists. The establishment of the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR) in Belfast in 1995 and the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) in Waterford in 2007 have changed the environment for biodiversity data management, and INJ articles are often accompanied by distribution maps including this information rather than detailed lists of records as in the past. INJ has a special section for records, which is now mostly announcements of species new to Ireland, and the annual log of cetacean strandings from the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.

THE FUTURE FOR INJ

From 1992, 'The Irish Naturalists' Journal

Limited' became a company limited by guarantee registered in Belfast. This is headed by a Board of up to 15 Directors who manage the finances and responsibilities of the company and appoint the officers to their various roles. The legalities may have changed, but the spirit of the committee system remains, in particular the importance of operating on an all-island basis. In the interests of attracting new contributors an 'emerging authors' prize was established for a brief period, but more recently a grant scheme commenced in 2020 and has supported a number of projects in a modest way.

In recent years, many of the historic Irish scientific journals have been digitised and are available online, mostly through subscription to the journal directly or to a service. This includes INJ and IN, which were part of the 'Ireland Collection' digitised in 2010 by the not-for-profit organisation JSTOR which makes over 2,800 titles available to personal subscribers to INJ. Authors now expect digital offprints, and journals that are without an online digital availability can be expected to struggle if they rely on hard copy alone.

There is a project in train to make Irish periodicals available on open access that may change the publishing model for many journals, including INJ. PublishOA.ie co-led by the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College Dublin and aims to assist scholarly publication and access to research. The project is conducting a feasibility study into creating an all-island Diamond Open Access publishing platform for Ireland. This project identified 180 active publishers of all kinds in Ireland as a whole (PublishOA Ireland 2023).

It will be up to INJ to face into the benefits of open publishing, while maintaining a business model that allows a Board to steer the publications for the benefits of the subscribers, authors and readership. While the landscape for publishers such as INJ may be changing, the demand for quality peer-reviewed articles on Irish natural history remains strong. So does the desire from authors to see their efforts preserved in print and distributed widely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the editorial teams working with me since taking on the role of Editor in 2012, and to the decades of fellow INJ Committee and Board members for their dedication and experience. INJ Chair, Aidan O'Hanlon, discovered the mentions of INJ in the letters of Andrew Bonaparte-Wyse, and members of the Board made useful comments on an earlier draft.

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