



## Contributing to the progress of descriptive taxonomy

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- Zootaxa published on average 288 issues in 23,330 pages at the frequency of 2–3 times per week during 2006–2008
- Zootaxa published more than one monograph (of 60 or more pages) each week during 2006–2008
- Zootaxa published over 100,000 pages for over 5,000 authors from more than 100 countries during 2001–2008
- Zootaxa contributed 14% of all new taxa of animals indexed in *Zoologica Record* in 2007
- Zootaxa contributed 4 of Top 10 New Species published in 2007
- Zootaxa was featured in *Essential Science Indicators* for its citation achievements in August 2008
- Zootaxa published a cybertaxonomy exemplar paper with 12,559 hits during the first month of its publication in 2008

One of the fundamental quests of biology is discovering how many species inhabit the Earth. Yet the vast majority of the world's animal species are waiting to be discovered, named and described—estimates of the total number vary from 5 to 30 million. Most biologists would agree that taxonomy is important and fundamental to credible biology, and descriptive taxonomy is the most important task of taxonomy (Wheeler 2007). Unfortunately, the reality is that descriptive taxonomy has been marginalized since the mid-1950s and has sustained serious losses in funding and academic positions in universities and museums around the world, especially since phylogenetic and molecular studies became popular in the last twenty years. During this period, there has also been an important historical trend in taxonomic publishing—many journal publishers/editors have been making increasing demands on authors to provide phylogenetic analysis, molecular systematics, and other modern types of information in taxonomic papers. In addition, there are long publication delays and/or increasing page charges for many journals that do publish descriptive taxonomic papers. *Zootaxa* was founded in 2001 to provide a much-needed outlet for descriptive taxonomic papers and monographs that are difficult to publish elsewhere, and as a result has received tremendous support from taxonomists worldwide, despite the fact that it is a grass-roots project without support from government and institutions (Zhang 2006a). *Zootaxa* satisfied the publishing need of many zoological taxonomists, and sustained a period of rapid growth during 2001 to 2006 (Zhang 2006b). During the last two years, it has continued to grow in size, and especially in its impact, and has become a major force in reviving descriptive taxonomy on a global scale. Here I summarize some encouraging data on the growth of *Zootaxa* and its impact. I also comment on its contribution to the progress of descriptive taxonomy.

### Growth in size and frequency

The growth of *Zootaxa* has been extremely rapid during the first six years: from 302 pages of 20 papers in 2001 to 22,052 pages of 1,020 papers in 2006 (Fig 1A, B). Thereafter, the number of papers and pages continued to increase, but at a much slower rate: e.g. the rate of increase in papers was on average 126% per year during 2002 to 2006 but only 6.5% during 2007 and 2008. It should be noted that during 2002–2006, the greatest rate of increase in papers occurred during the second and third years (435% and 150%, respectively), due to the low base numbers of papers in the first and second years when the journal was just launched. The rate of increase in number of papers dropped to 49% and 44% respectively in the fourth and fifth year. The inclusion of *Zootaxa* in ISI's database *Science Citation Index Expanded* in 2004 seemed to have attracted a sudden increase in the submissions of papers in late 2004 and early 2005, which resulted in the rate of increase of papers in 2006 bouncing back to 78% (although still much lower than those of the second and third year).

The frequency of publication increased from 15 per year in 2001 to 103 per year in 2004 (Fig. 2). It remained at about two per week (based on 50 weeks per year) during 2004 to 2006, and then increased gradually to about three per week in 2008. It should be noted that when *Zootaxa* was started, each paper was separately issued and printed until the end of the fifth year. In May 2005, short papers of fewer than 60 pages were no longer published separately; instead, they were grouped to form issues of 60, 64, or 68 pages to save paper, printing and mailing costs. Since then, *Zootaxa* has been publishing 5–6 issues twice or three times, of 467 pages each week.