

## Identifying predatory journals – a few simple steps

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Sorooshian<sup>1</sup> has highlighted an important aspect which we are witnessing today – publication phishing. He describes how these ‘phishers’ use techniques to lure gullible scientists (or gullible writers who want to have a publication to add to their CV or for promotion, in some cases) to believe that a journal is authentic, where, in fact, it may not. The techniques used by these phishers include either designing a website, or coin a name which is phonetically similar to a well-known publisher. The normal prey are those researchers who are in the early stages of their career, whose research work is not of high quality and standard, who cannot write their research work in a scholarly language, may have copied a part of their research work from earlier published articles, or who want fast publication of their work as many of these ‘phishers’ claim to have a ‘fast turnaround time for publication’. In many cases, the ‘phishers’ who normally are predatory publishers/predatory journals as identified by Jeffrey Beall<sup>2</sup>, try to play around the vulnerabilities of the researchers as publication of research work in high-quality, reputed journals normally takes a few weeks to a few months and undergoes rigorous editorial and peer review, requires corrections/changes to be made on part of the authors who are not sure of the outcome of the review process.

Sorooshian<sup>1</sup> has also highlighted the precautions, including checking of website, domain registration, etc. to be taken into consideration by the authors/researchers while communicating their research work for publication. In addition to the use of technology to understand the ‘phishers’, there are a few basic aspects, which every researcher should check before communicating a manuscript to any journal. These basic rules may help genuine researchers avoid trap to be a victim of predatory publisher/predatory journals. Although the thumb rules to identify predatory publishers are well known among the experienced researchers, these might help novices or inexperienced researchers in segregating good-quality journals from predatory journals/publishers.

The phishers or predatory journals/publishers are an outcome of open access (OA) publishing. OA publishing was

aimed at making research available to a larger scientific community, for which the author(s) bear the cost. It was also aimed to ensure that research funded through tax-payers’ money is available to all without any obligation to pay on the part of users. However, the aim of OA publishing has become one of most misused (or rather abused) ways by publishers who have no credence of their own. In order to avoid such predatory publishers, a few simple and basic steps are necessary to check the authenticity of a journal:

1. Title of the journal and disguised origin: The first thing to notice while identifying a genuine journal is the title of the journal. Predatory journals are disguised with the title Global, International, World, American, European<sup>3</sup>, ‘Advanced Journal of...’, etc. to fool the naïve researchers. This is used to convince researchers that these journals are from the developed countries, whereas in fact, the roots to these journals are found in developing countries. The researchers are advised to verify the title of the journal in reputed databases like Web of Science and/or Scopus.

2. Editor and editorial board members: Look at the editor and editorial board of the journal. In case of predatory journal, the editor is neither an academician nor a researcher and details regarding editorial board members are not available if searched on-line, based on the affiliation provided.

3. Origin of editor and editorial board members: Most of the editorial board members belong to developing countries, whose scholarly credentials cannot be ascertained. Some of the members claimed to be from developed countries have their origin in the developing countries.

4. Scope of journal: Scope of the journal is kept very wide in order to attract papers from all scientific disciplines and make money. The authors/researchers should read the scope of the journal. If the journal seems to publish papers from all possible scientific disciplines and invites paper to be submitted for the ‘next’ or the ‘forthcoming’ issue in any scientific discipline, beware. Predatory journals invite papers from vari-

ous disciplines like medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, allied health, life sciences, biotechnology, engineering, technology, humanities and management, business, etc. Papers from unrelated scientific disciplines are published by phishers or predatory publishers/journals. However, there are many authentic journals, published by reputed publishers or scientific societies, which are multidisciplinary in nature. These journals have been publishing scholarly work for a long time and have been able to establish themselves by publishing articles that have undergone rigorous editorial and peer reviews, and are of benefit to the readers.

5. Guidelines/instructions to authors: Many predatory journals/publishers simply copy instructions to authors from well-known publishers. Some of the published papers in the journals simply violate the requirements mentioned as guidelines/instruction to authors. The objective is not sharing scientific knowledge, but make money through submissions received.

6. Language of the articles and the text: If one looks closely at the articles published in such predatory journals, they are poorly written. The articles submitted are published as such with a lot of typographical as well as grammatical errors. The language of some of articles is so poor that it becomes extremely difficult for readers to understand what the author(s) want to convey through their manuscripts.

7. Publication charges: The phishers or predatory journals/publishers entice vulnerable researchers with charging nominal amounts in the name of publication and maintenance fees. Some of these publishers have an option of paying per person charges, whereas others charge an amount which can be easily shared by a few people contributing equal amount towards publishing a paper. Researchers/authors should read carefully about publication charges, as some of the publishers do not mention about them on their website, but send an e-mail within 2–3 days after acceptance of the article.

8. Publication turnaround time: Many of these journals claim to have ‘fast

turnaround time' from submission to publication. In many cases, the journals ask authors to pay money while submitting their articles, which is an indirect indication that the article submitted will be uploaded on-line in next 2–3 days once the payment is received. In a few cases, journals ask the authors to first submit their manuscripts. Within a few days, they receive an e-mail from the journal editor stating acceptance of paper after which they are asked to deposit money in a particular bank account using electronic transfer. Journals claiming to have 'fast turnaround time' should be thoroughly checked for authenticity.

9. Contact details on 'contact us' page: Check the contact details. Most of the predatory publishers do not provide any contact address. By clicking 'contact us', a window opens up where authors are required to provide some details and are assured of a response from the journal editorial team. In other cases, a generic e-mail id is provided, which should sound warning bell.

These basic thumb rules also require use of sensible judgement on part of the researchers. When in doubt, it is also advisable to take help from those who have experience in publishing scholarly articles in scientific journals of repute. A

few simple steps can help researchers avoid being prey to scientific predators.

1. Sorooshian, S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2016, **110**(5), 766–767.
2. <https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>
3. Bajpai, M., *Br. Dent. J.*, 2015, **219**, 147; <http://www.nature.com/bdj/journal/v219/n4/full/sj.bdj.2015.643.html#a1> (accessed 17 March 2016).

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## Remembering Joseph Dalton Hooker

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The 30th of June of 2017 will mark the 200th birth anniversary of Joseph Dalton Hooker, who was born as the second son to William Jackson Hooker and Maria Sarah Hooker née Turner in Suffolk, England. He died in Sunningdale, England, on 10 December 1911 at a ripe age of 94. His monumental seven-volume *Flora of British India* (1872–1897) is being consulted extensively even today not only within the Indian subcontinent, but throughout the world.

During his stay in India between 1848 and 1851, Hooker spent his time in

Calcutta and its neighbourhood, mostly travelling further north, into the Himalaya and its foothills. He explored these natural areas for botanical novelties. His passion to explore plants seems to have been triggered in him by his botanist-father. Hooker's versatility of knowledge of natural materials was so profound that he powerfully radiates his brilliant knowledge about animals and landscapes and geomorphology, in addition to plants, in his articles and books. The two-volume *Himalayan Journals*<sup>1</sup> are indeed an academic treat to anyone interested in India's fascinating natural history for the details they provide and the lucid prose in which the entire text is presented. Many have chronicled Hooker's life and work admirably<sup>2,3</sup>.

As a young lad (7 years), Hooker attended his father's lectures in Botany at the University of Glasgow, which obviously enticed him to study plants for the rest of his life. Hooker started his professional life as a Royal Navy Surgeon after qualifying for M D from the University of Glasgow in 1839. He was recruited as an Assistant Surgeon in the Antarctica exploration fleet (H.M.S. *Erebus*, H.M.S. *Terror*, 1839–1843). This expedition made phenomenal discoveries<sup>4</sup>. Hooker, aged 22, looked for plants (including marine algae, which were published in the *London Journal of Botany*, co-written with William Harvey<sup>5</sup>) during this expedition. A collective edition of these vari-

ous papers is available today as the *Botany of the Antarctic Voyage*<sup>6</sup>. During this trip, Hooker delved into the natural history of New Zealand and Tasmania. On his return to England, Hooker secured a government grant, which enabled him to travel to the Indian subcontinent in 1848.

In the document, which was later consolidated and published as the *Notes of a Tour in the Plains of India, the Himala [read as Himalaya], and Borneo*<sup>7</sup>, he indicates in the preface (p. iii), which explains his decision to travel to India for plant exploration and also to learn biogeography:

'Having accompanied Sir James Ross on his voyage of discovery of the Antarctic regions, where botany was my chief pursuit, I was anxious to add to my acquaintance with the natural history of the temperate zones, more knowledge of that of the tropics than I had hitherto had the opportunity of acquiring. My choice lay between India and the Andes, and I decided upon the former, being principally influenced by Dr Falconer, the Superintendent of the H.E.I.C. Botanic Garden at Calcutta. He drew my attention to the fact that we were ignorant even of the geography of the central and eastern parts of these mountains (*sic.* the Himalaya), while all to the north was involved in



Joseph Dalton Hooker

Source: *Popular Science Monthly*, The Science Press, New York, 1902.