

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF
BIOLOGICAL REVIEWS

BY

THE EDITOR

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All the early parts of *Biological Reviews* are still available and prices of sets or single parts can be supplied to Fellows and Associates by the Librarian of the Society and to other enquirers by the Publishers, Cambridge University Press, 200 Euston Road, London, N.W. 1 or 32 East 57th Street, New York 22, N.Y., U.S.A.

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H. Munro Fox, editor since 1926.

(Facing p. 1)

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF *BIOLOGICAL REVIEWS*

By THE EDITOR

The Cambridge Philosophical Society was founded in the year 1819 and the *Proceedings* started publication in 1844. In 1922 the Council decided to publish biological material separately and in the following year there appeared the first number of Volume 1 of the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society, Biological Sciences*. During publication of the four numbers constituting Volume 1 it became clear, however, that there were not enough research papers to justify this new periodical in addition to long established ones, particularly as the *British Journal of Experimental Biology* had also just been launched. It was then suggested by Mr (now Sir James) Gray that the biological *Proceedings* should publish review articles. This resulted in Volume 2 of the biological *Proceedings* becoming *Biological Reviews and Biological Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*; it was published in 1926-27. The words 'and Biological Proceedings' were dropped with Volume 10 in 1935.

It was not easy at the beginning to find enough suitable authors, since the writing of a review article is a serious and time-consuming undertaking. Nevertheless, the first volume of *Biological Reviews* included articles by M. Abeloos, G. R. de Beer, J. B. S. Haldane, F. H. A. Marshall, A. S. Parkes, M. Prenant, O. W. Richards, F. S. Russell and H. E. Tunnicliffe. It is perhaps surprising that the difficulty of finding a sufficiency of good authors has never diminished in the 38 years of our existence, although there are many more biological research workers now than formerly. The reason for this anomaly is that more and more opportunities have arisen for writers of reviews and research summaries, not only in new specialist review journals and 'Annual Reviews' of this and that, but also in composite books with a different author for each chapter.

It may not be generally known that the majority of our articles result from personal invitation, only a small minority of the published contributions being sent in to us uninvited and accepted. The invitations to write are made by the editor, frequently acting on advice given by colleagues at home and abroad. Such advice is, however, seldom offered spontaneously and has to be sought continually. Relatively few of the colleagues who are approached give the desired advice, though some are helpful and a very few have been outstanding in the course of past years in proposing good authors: the names of Joseph Needham, Julian Huxley, P. W. Richards and Dixon Boyd come particularly to mind. Of the numerous invitations to write reviews that are sent out on such advice, only a few are accepted and of these by no means all result in manuscripts. It is therefore always necessary to have many more definite promises of articles than could be published if all the promises were kept. At the present time there are over 40 promises of manuscripts for the near future, whereas the number of articles that we actually publish per annum is only from 12 to 16.

We try to cover all aspects of biology. Our reviews are authoritative and critical, written by people who have made their name in the subject dealt with or by young workers of ability who have already published research on the topic. Writers are asked not only to summarize recent work critically but to develop an original thesis, and some of our contributions have played an outstanding part in moulding biological thought, for instance that by R. A. Fisher in 1931 on 'The evolution of dominance'. Past volumes contain accounts of the situation at the time of writing in various fields of research which will have a permanent value for the history of biological science. In the case of young writers, manuscripts are read and criticized by specialists, either before or after presentation to us. All manuscripts are then closely edited for clarity and grammar, the quality of which varies greatly. Authors are asked to use a style comprehensible not only to the specialist reader, but also to other biologists. In many branches this is not possible when describing details, but an *Introduction* and a section of *Conclusions* can always be made informative to the non-specialist. For the last 30 years we have required a detailed *Summary* at the end of the article and this has been found most valuable, particularly by teachers. At first the summary was unpopular with authors, who said that the review itself was a summary, but the practice has now long been accepted. The titles of papers quoted are required in the *References*. We publish one volume a year in quarterly parts, and the usual interval between the reception of a manuscript and publication is 9 or 12 months, but we are able to keep our articles up to date by an *Addendum* dealing with the most recent work, sent in with the corrected first proof. We like to have four articles in each number, but often there are only three because some authors will not restrict themselves to the number of words requested on the wrapper of each number. Occasionally we are able to print five contributions, thanks to one or more unusually short ones. It is naturally more attractive to our very varied readers to have a greater choice. An *Index* is issued at the close of each decade.

The continuous increase in our circulation is seen from Fig. 1, which shows that the growth curve of sales has not yet approached a plateau. There was an inevitable retardation and even falling off during the war years, but recovery started before peace came. Not only were customers scarcer during the war, but we had to face the shortage of paper by cutting down length, printing in smaller type with double columns and narrow margins, and omitting titles of papers in the *References*. Paper quality was maintained as long as possible but the repulped paper became grey with printing ink; the photolithographic re-issues do not suffer this defect. Since the war the rate of increase of sales has been over three times what it was before the war. Fig. 1 gives the sales of whole volumes in each year of issue, but in addition to this new subscribers buy back sets which increase the total sales. All back issues are kept available by periodical copying. Over and above the sales, a number of volumes go out to Fellows and other volumes are sent as exchanges for journals received by the Library which are most valuable to the Society. Last year 218 Fellows received *Biological Reviews* and 282 volumes went out as exchanges. In one or other of these ways the journal goes to over seventy different countries. Many of our published articles have come to us from abroad, and a list is given in Table 1 of the number we have printed

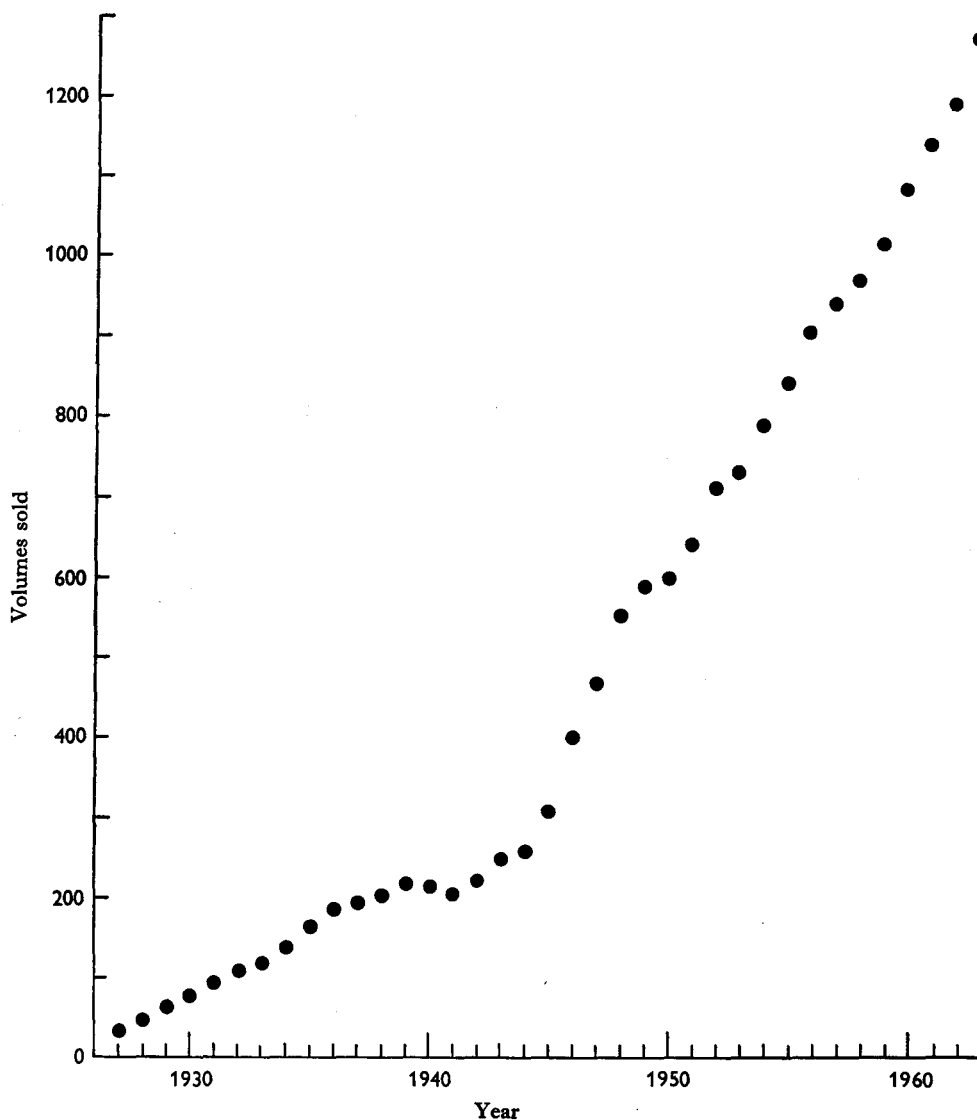


Fig. 1. Sales of complete volumes of *Biological Reviews* in each year of issue.

Table 1. The number of articles from each of twenty-seven countries published in Volumes 2-39 (1926-1964)

Australia	9	Finland	1	New Zealand	1
Austria	2	France	15	Poland	2
Belgium	8	Germany	25	South Africa	4
Brazil	1	Hungary	2	Sweden	5
Canada	10	India	3	Switzerland	3
Czechoslovakia	2	Israel	1	Trinidad	2
Denmark	7	Italy	1	United Kingdom	329
Egypt	1	Jamaica	1	U.S.A.	96
Eire	1	Netherlands	6	U.S.S.R.	2

up to the end of 1964 from each of twenty-seven countries, the total being 570. The largest contributory country abroad has been the United States, whose biologists gave invaluable help in the war years when it was so difficult to find authors. Our contributions are published in English, French or German, which emphasizes the international character of the periodical. German *Summaries* have always been translated into English; before the war this was not thought necessary for French *Summaries* but now these too are translated.

In conclusion, it should be put on record that many contributors have praised the work of our publishers, the Cambridge University Press.

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