

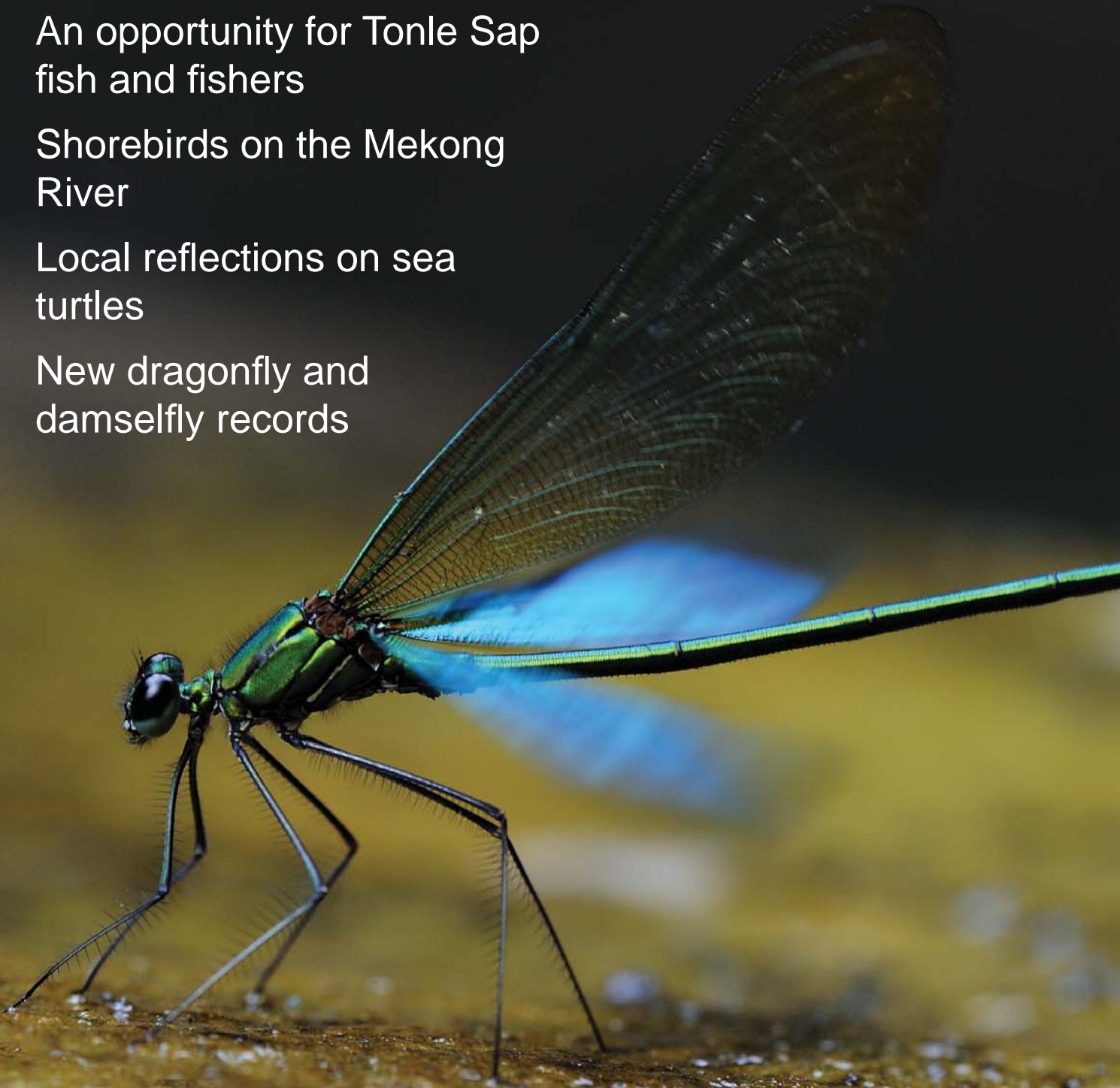
Cambodian Journal of Natural History

An opportunity for Tonle Sap
fish and fishers

Shorebirds on the Mekong
River

Local reflections on sea
turtles

New dragonfly and
damselfly records



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Cover photo: A male *Neurobasis chinensis* in Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary flashes his metallic hind wings (© Jeremy Holden). One of Cambodia’s most spectacular damselflies, this species can be found along fast-flowing streams and rivers. Recent surveys of dragonflies and damselflies are presented by Oleg Kosterin *et al.* in this issue.

Editorial—How to write a winning paper

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The *Cambodian Journal of Natural History* was launched in 2008 to help address the critical need for information on the status, use and management of the biodiversity of Cambodia. Besides publishing and distributing peer-reviewed papers in a free, open-access forum, this journal also aims to strengthen the writing skills of Cambodian conservation researchers and managers.

In the last issue (Volume 2012, number 1), one of us (MF) offered some personal advice to would-be writers, based on long experience as both an author and an editor. Here, we thought it would be helpful to provide some more detailed advice on how to construct a winning scientific article and how to avoid some common pitfalls.

The sections outlined below follow the structure of full papers in most scientific journals, including the *Cambodian Journal of Natural History*. When preparing a manuscript, however, you should always read and heed the journal's own Instructions for Contributors (the instructions for this journal can be found at the back of this issue). It is also a good idea to look at recent issues of the journal to gain a feel for its style and gauge whether it will suit your material.

Title

This is the hook to capture your readers, and should be fairly short—ideally not more than 10 words. The title should give an honest indication of the contents of the paper, but does not need to be dry and dull. For example, the title “Is fire good for forests?” could arouse more interest than “A study of the impacts of anthropogenic burning on the composition of plants in dry forests”. Some authors like to include their principal aim or conclusion in the title, e.g. “First census of white-shouldered ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* reveals roost-site mismatch with Cambodia's protected areas”.

Authors

Will you be the only author of the paper, or should there be one or more coauthors? It is entirely up to you to decide, but a useful rule of thumb is that every coauthor

ought to have made at least two of the following four contributions:-

- *Planning/facilitating the research*: e.g. figuring out how to collect data, identifying the research questions, securing grants to fund the work, providing essential equipment, identifying the research site.
- *Collecting data*: e.g. interviewing villagers, setting camera traps, conducting a literature review, identifying species.
- *Analysing data*: e.g. statistical and graphical analysis, providing new insights from the results.
- *Writing the paper*: e.g. writing some sections of the manuscript, giving extensive comments on early drafts.

For the *Cambodian Journal of Natural History*, we urge all foreign authors to invite their Cambodian counterparts and assistants to be coauthors.

There is practically no limit on the number of people who can coauthor a paper—the current record being 2,926 authors for one paper on the Large Hadron Collider! However, it is important that every author agrees to their name being included. Every coauthor should have a chance to review successive drafts of the paper and approve the final version.

Deciding the order in which names are presented can be difficult. We recommend: (i) The person who has done the most work in writing the paper should be the First Author (the first name in the list); (ii) If another person has done a large share of the writing, they can be the second name in the list; (iii) Most coauthors can then be listed in alphabetical order, using their family names; (iii) If there are a lot of coauthors it is a common practice for the most senior member (e.g. the professor or head of the department) to be placed last. However, decisions about authorship and the order of names should be made by the First Author in consultation with the other authors.

The ‘Corresponding Author’ is the person to whom questions or requests should be directed by readers. This is usually the First Author, but can be one of the coauthors, by mutual consent.

Abstract (Summary)

Apart from the title, most people read only the Abstract. It must therefore be understandable on its own. The Abstract helps readers to decide whether to read the entire article and, more importantly, tells them your main findings.

A recommended structure for the Abstract is as follows (but do not include subheadings): *Background*: A simple opening sentence to give the context of your study; *Aims*: One or two sentences giving the purpose of the work; *Methods*: One or two sentences explaining what you did; *Results*: One or two sentences to summarise your main findings; *Conclusions*: One sentence giving the most important consequences or implications of the work, e.g. What do the results mean? How will they be used? What recommendations are you making as a result of this work?

The Abstract should not contain any references or abbreviations. Most journals set a strict word limit for abstracts. The *Cambodian Journal of Natural History* permits a maximum of 250 words.

Although the Abstract appears at the start, this is usually the last section to be written. We suggest you re-read your entire paper from start to finish and then draft the Abstract without looking back at the text. Try to avoid copying entire sentences—you are liable to include too much information, or too little.

Keywords

Keywords are used by database search engines to help people locate articles containing subjects of interest to them. Most journals set a maximum of eight keywords, but check the Instructions for Contributors for guidance.

Here are some suggestions for picking keywords:

- If your paper focuses on a particular region, habitat, species or community, use that as a keyword e.g. Annamite Mountains, mangroves, tiger, dipterocarps, Stung Treng.
- Consider using your materials or techniques e.g. camera-trapping, electron microscope, animal tracks, Participatory Land Use Planning, interviews.
- If they were discussed in your paper, include important issues or phenomena e.g. climate change, pollution, habitat fragmentation, fisheries, Forestry Law.
- If covered in your Discussion, refer to possible future applications or recommendations e.g. sustainable harvesting, habitat restoration, species conservation, payments for environmental services, training.

Introduction

The purpose of the Introduction is to present the subject of your work and place it in the context of what is already known about this topic. Write this section in the past or present tense, *not* in the future tense (avoid expressions such as “This study will examine...”).

The first and last paragraphs of your Introduction are the most important. First, you must provide some context and background for your work, referring to the work of others as appropriate. Try to avoid mentioning your study organism and study location in the first paragraph. The Introduction is meant to introduce the reader to your research, not summarise and evaluate everything that has ever been written on the subject.

Depending on the journal you are submitting to, you should consider whether the audience is likely to be general or specialised. For example, if you submit an article on Asian elephants to the *Cambodian Journal of Natural History* you ought to provide more background information on elephants than if you submit it to *Gajah* (the journal of the IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group).

You also need to consider whether to use the passive or active voice in your article. For example, the *passive voice* would say “the work was carried out” and “it was observed that...”, whereas the *active voice* would say “I carried out the work” or “we observed that...” (use the singular ‘I’ if you are the only author). Whichever style you choose, be consistent throughout your article. We recommend you use the active voice.

The final paragraph or last few sentences (depending on the length of the Introduction) should contain your research questions or the aims of your work.

Methods

This is often the easiest section to write and many authors prefer to write this section first.

The Methods should provide a clear description of how you carried out your study. A good way to approach this section is to imagine that one of the readers wants to replicate your study. Your methods must be sufficiently clear for them to repeat your study accurately, without asking you for further information. This section also allows other researchers to evaluate your methodology and judge whether your conclusions are valid.

Methods sections are normally fairly short and do not require subsection headings. (As a general rule, use subsections only if the Methods section is longer than five paragraphs). Your Methods should contain a thor-