

WHO ARE THE PREDATORS?

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I assume most of you are familiar with [Beall's list of predatory publishers](#). This list contains information on (currently) 195 publishers that, according to Jeffrey Beall, are publishers more interested in getting an income than in publishing quality-assured science.

Now, Beall is undoubtedly pointing at a serious problem. Establishing more or less "fake" publishing ventures is very easy in an Open Access (OA) world, using the ubiquitous OJS software. Something resembling an honest publisher may be set up with only a few hours of work. Such publishers are a problem for the reputation of OA, because their lack of quality will taint the concept of OA. We should all get together and try to rid the world of these publishers. A major step forward will be to demand authors actually try to check the quality of journals they want to publish in, e.g. by reading some recent articles or looking at the editorial board.

In Norway, the body accrediting journals for the Norwegian financing system for the research and higher education sector, this spring withdrew accreditation for nearly 200 journals due to questions about their peer review systems and quality. And we know they actively try to avoid getting more dubious journals into the system. Beall's list has been one of the inputs in this process.

Unfortunately, Beall's list is a very personal one with a lack of stringent criteria. A number of listings have been openly criticised by senior "statesmen" of the OA community. E.g. Beall is automatically negative to publishers and journals with only a few articles to their name. It seems he don't realize even *The philosophical transactions of the Royal Society* had to start with a handful of articles.



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If we overlook the problem of these publishers tainting the reputation of serious OA publishers, what about their predation? A constant criticism from Beall is the lack of articles, so most of these journals are unable to draw much money out of authors or institutions. And the overall picture is one of low APCs. If we assume, to take a number out of the hat, that these publishers on average manage to get USD 50,000 per year out of the budget of scientific institutions, this sums up to about USD 10,000,000. This is a lot of money, but a tiny fraction of the cost of science. And my guess is that this is a high estimate.

We could then look at Elsevier, the major traditional publisher. While there is no reason to suspect Elsevier of tampering with quality – though low quality journals undoubtedly are to be found in their portfolio, too – other aspects of their business could be worth looking at under the headline of "predatory". In 2011 Elsevier had an "Adjusted operating profit" of GBP 768,000,000. This is more than 1,200,000,000 USD. Or, 120 times the combined cost of the "predatory" publishers. The operating profit of Elsevier is paid by science, just as the whole income of the predatory publishers.

But if 10 million USD makes 195 publishers predatory, what should one call the single publisher that "gets away" with 1,2 billion USD?