



Predatory publishers

How to recognise them
and not get trapped

Beata Tokarczuk

University of Agriculture in Krakow

Publishing in electronic journals edited under the requirements of the Open Access movement may involve certain risks.

There are publishers who, taking advantage of the growing popularity of this model, are only interested in making a quick profit when accepting articles for publication and do not care about the content of their journals.

An important part of the definition of predatory journals are *entities, that prioritise their own interests at the expense of researchers.*



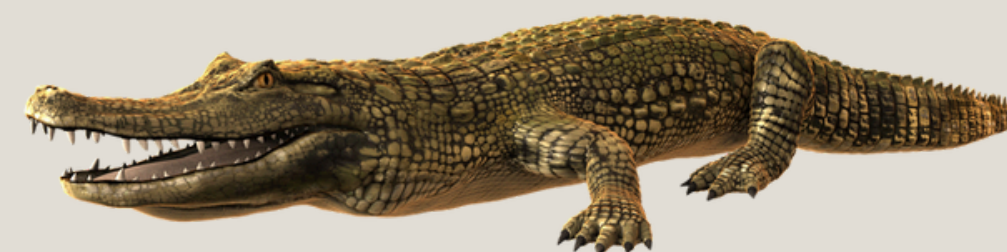
Such activity
of publishers is described
as *predatory open access
publishing*.



The term was first formulated by University of Colorado Denver librarian Jeffrey Beall, who published a list of predatory publishers and predatory journals on his *Scholarly Open Access* blog. In January 2017, Beall deactivated his blog along with the List due to numerous lawsuits and threats of defamation lawsuits by publishers.

It can still be found online under the name *Beall's List of Potential Predatory Journals and Publishers* at:

<https://beallist.net/>

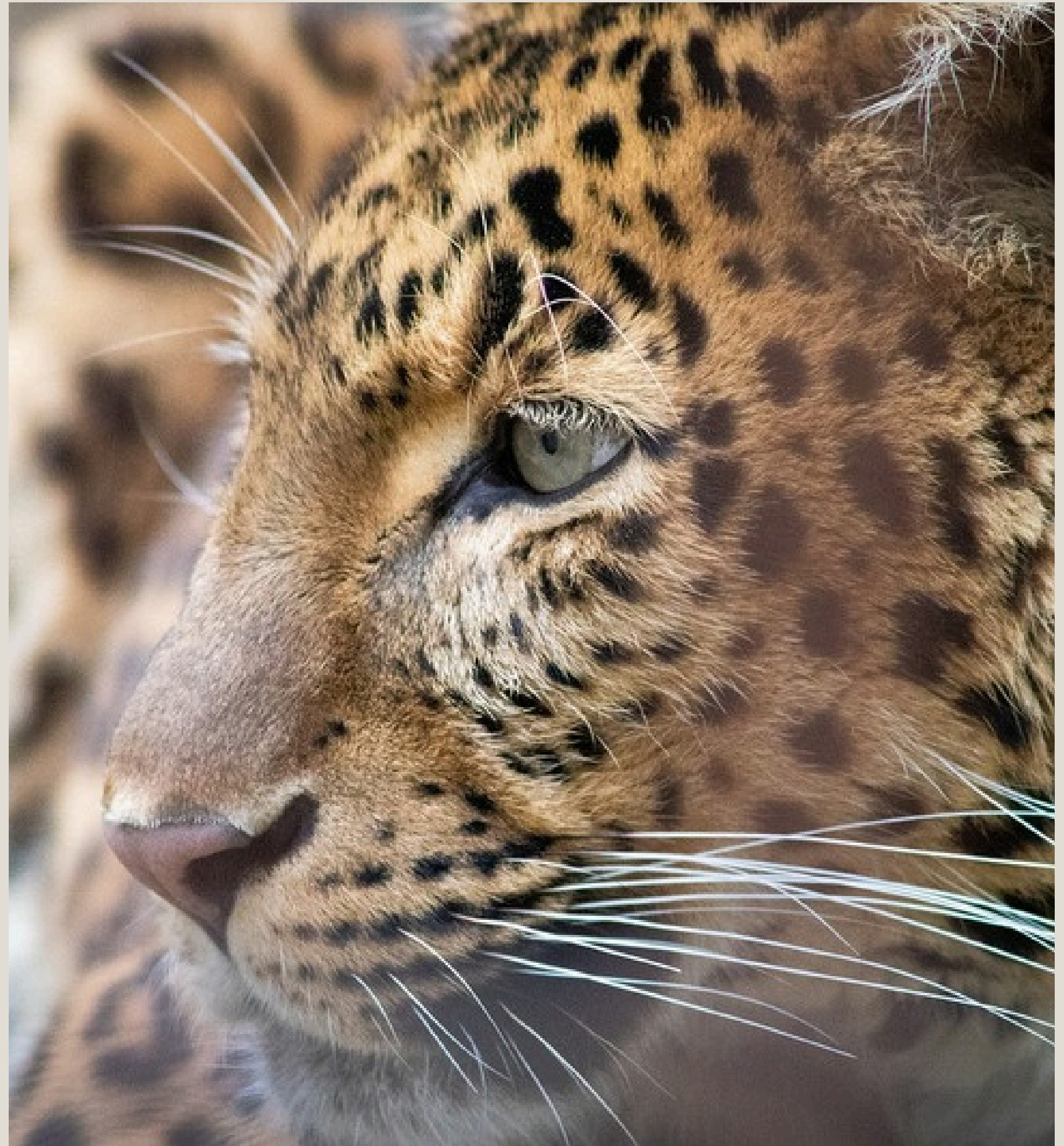


An anonymous group of people took up Beall's work and kept developing his list. The *Predatory Journals* website has a list of publishers and journals considered by authors to be predatory, but the list is no longer updated and the fact that you do not find a particular title in it does not prove anything. It should also be kept in mind that in the course of his work, Jeffrey Beall has sometimes been accused of arbitrariness in getting individual publishers onto the list, often a lack of experience in journal publishing can be mistaken for with unfair practices.

Therefore, the fact that a journal is on this type of list should be a clear warning signal to the author, however, in the final decision to send an article there should use their own judgement and, if in doubt, seek assistance from the Library.



Predatory publishers



This is an ethically devoid business model adopted by some scientific publishers. In this type of editorial board, the publication review process is fictitious, as all papers sent and paid for are usually published. In these publishing houses, profits are valued more than the principles of publishing results and the ethics of scientific work, which is why the most commonly used publication option is the *Gold Open Access* route.



This is one of open access publishing models, in which journal publishers make all articles and related content available free of charge on the journal's website immediately after publication.

There are a range of indicators that characterise predatory magazines.

The false information concerns the editorial team, the review process or citation rates. The titles are similar to those used by established scientific journals or even impersonate them. Submitted articles are accepted for publication very quickly (often in less than a month) from the moment the manuscript is sent, without reviewer comments.



The occurrence of one of these elements does not, of course, determine the predation of a journal, but the fulfilment of several conditions should make researchers reconsider where to publish their article.

Predatory magazines are a deliberately applied business model, rather than the low standards or pseudo-science that are sometimes found.



Publishers are using the idea of open access here for the unethical purpose of profiting from unreliable publishing practices. Predatory journals are keen to use the open access slogan to illusorily raise the cost of publication. It is for the potential quick profit in the form of APC (Article Processing Charge) fees that predatory journals are geared towards publishing as many articles as possible in the shortest possible time - the review process, and often ordinary proof-reading, is virtually non-existent with such procedures. This situation encourages the spread of harmful pseudoscientific works that have not undergone a fair review process.

To sum up: why is this activity possible

Publish or perish:

For many academics, career development depends on the research papers they publish;

Technology

Starting a website, spamming thousands of potential authors and receiving electronic payments has become easy;

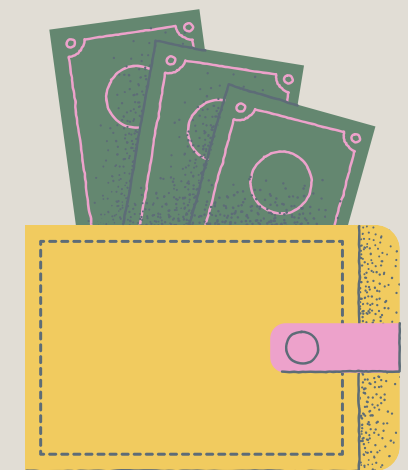
Lack of experience

Working online without access to expertise makes it difficult to verify false impact indicators, etc;

Using the Open Access model:

The pay-to-publish model is overused.

<https://pg.edu.pl/openscience/open-access/drapiezne-czasopisma>



Warning signs in brief



IMPORTANT - Warning signs are INDICATIONS, not necessarily EVIDENCE, of predatory activity



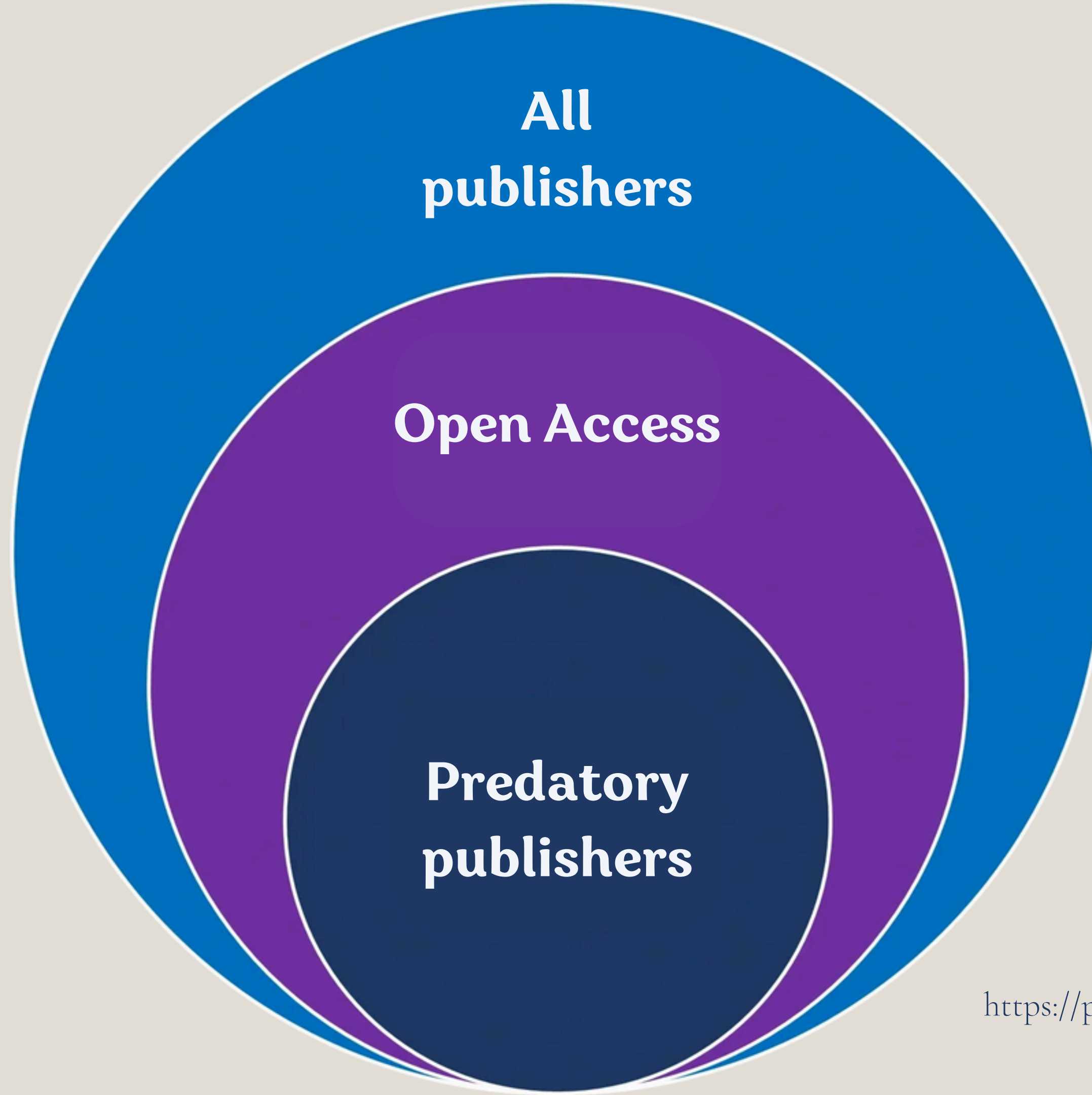
Lack of transparency

Little or no information on, how editorial decisions are made, what fees are applied and how the peer review process looks like; no contact information; lack of details on article development fees; editors and editorial board members are often unverifiable.



Aggressive, indiscreet soliciting

Aggressive solicitation, such as repeated emails, overly complimentary in tone (a clear warning sign that the invitee's discipline extends beyond the scope of the magazine)



**All
publishers**

Open Access

**Predatory
publishers**

An example email spam

From: (name of journal)
To: XY@institution.com
Subject: Upcoming Special Issue

Dear Dr/Mr. XY

Greetings from (name of journal)! →

Not easily distinguished from genuine journals/ publishers

I am writing to introduce (name of journal), which is a newly launched journal by (name of publisher) from (name of country). →

Majority in low/middle income countries, but often claim addresses in US/UK

We greatly acknowledge your research and contribution to the field of (name of research discipline).

We would like to invite you to submit a research manuscript to our Journal and to give us a chance to associate with an esteemed researcher like you.

→ **Often include flattering personalized greetings**

→ **Indexed in illegitimate abstracting and indexing services**

The Journal (indexed in *BioXYZ*, *ABC*, *Open J-Gate*) is planning to publish a special issue on the topic of (name of topic), and would like to request a contribution from you.

You can submit your manuscript either through email at (email address) or through our online submission system (link). If possible, we would appreciate your submission on or before (date). Kindly let us know your feasibility regarding submission to our Journal.

Kind regards,

XX Editor In Chief. →

No academic information provided about editor/staff/review board members

Examples of false indicators

The screenshot shows a journal website with a navigation bar at the top containing links for Home, Current Issue, Past Issues, Conference, Topics, Editorial & Reviewer, and About The Journal. A large banner image depicts a computer lab with people working at desks. Below the banner, a green bar contains the text "Volume 9, Issue 3 is now available online." A prominent green button labeled "Submit Article" is visible. The main content area features a "Welcome to Global Journal of Advanced Research" message with "Impact Factor: 2.384" and "ICV : 57.43". A sidebar on the right lists "AUTHORS" (Author Guidelines, Publication Charges, Paper Template, Copyright Form, Submit Copyright Form, Submit fee, FAQ) and "OTHER LINKS" (Editorial team, Peer Review, Indexing, Proceeding & Special Issue, CrossRef ISSN). A grid of logos is displayed, including CiteFactor, JIFACTOR, Google scholar, OAJI.net, AcademicKeys, Scribd, Universität Vechta, and Directory of Science. A red circle highlights the CiteFactor and JIFACTOR logos.

- Random photos and cliparts used as branding
- Ambiguous and misleading metrics - "CiteFactor" = CiteScore/"JIFACTOR" = Journal Impact Factor or JIF
- Too wide a range of accepted manuscripts



Criteria
that characterise
predatory
publishers

1

The publisher is also the editor of the journal, or the editor-in-chief, the members of the editorial board and the review team are not precisely identified - often the entire 'editorial board' is one or two people, so information about who edits and reviews a given journal is not given at all.

2

Lack of affiliations or profiles of editors and reviewers - of course, we cannot tell whether a journal is predatory based on this one criterion alone, but the lack of more detailed information about the people running it should raise suspicions.

3

There are indications that question the credibility of the editorial board members' competence in the field which the journal represents.

4

Several journals have the same editorial team - if there are multiple journals from different scientific disciplines on the publisher's platform, but each journal's website shows the the same editors' names on the publisher's website, it means that they may not have the right qualifications for such thematically diverse journals.

5

Fictitious editorial board members or members named without their consent or knowledge - naming a well-known Nobel laureate as a reviewer without his or her knowledge or consent? Why not? This can always improve the prestige of a journal. In a situation where we have a suspicion that a review team is fake (e.g. when none of them have published any article in that journal) we can check if there is a mention of our journal on their ORCID or Publons profiles.

6

Members of the editorial team use email addresses in free domains, e.g. gmail.com or yahoo.com, or there is no email address at all, only a contact form.





Publishing activity

1

Lack of transparency in publishing policy - journals that care about reliability and credibility should have a detailed description of the publication process on their website: guidelines for authors, but also the type and course of the review process or rules for archiving published material. The absence of such information suggests that they do not exist.

2

There is a lack of precise information on article processing costs (Article Processing Charge, APC), additional costs arise during the publication process.

3

The publisher releases magazines that are too general in scope or combine multiple disciplines, the layout of all the titles on the site is identical - publishing a journal is a difficult and complicated process, but in the case of 'predators' dozens of new titles can appear on the publisher's site overnight, with all the subpages of each journal looking identical.

4

Unprofessional website design - of course the content of published articles is the most important thing, but pages that look like they were created in an hour should arouse our suspicions. The site looks amateurish, colours and graphics clash, there are distracting background images, scrolling links, clipart etc.

5

The publisher promises authors fast publication and a very short review process (usually associated with additional fee) - which means certainty of publication with little or no review of the quality of the submitted work. .

6

The publisher does not allow search engines to index the content of the publication - this may indicate, that the publisher is trying to protect itself from detection of duplicate or plagiarised publications.

7

The publisher is engaged in spamming to get new authors or editors - 'aggressive marketing' in the form of numerous emails sent en masse to everyone with an address on a given domain is a hallmark of publishers focused on quick profit.



Reliability



1

The publisher does not devote enough resources to prevent cases of plagiarism, self-plagiarism and other practices of scientific dishonesty, the published materials often do not meet the basic requirements for scientific publications, often the articles are not subject to any proofreading or verification and are often files sent by the authors - sometimes it is just enough to open the articles made available on the website to see sloppy editing and numerous typos.

2

The name of the journal is not in line with its mission, the publisher provides false Impact Factors or uses self-created fictitious bibliometric indices, e.g. World Impact Factor, Scientific Impact Factor, etc. Moreover, databases that supposedly index a given title are often mentioned, whereas a quick check establishes its absence even in standard library catalogues.

3

The publisher does not use standards to identify the publication, such as DOI or ISSN, or uses them incorrectly, often the identifiers in question simply do not exist, and the journal is not registered in the ISSN database.



4

The publisher uses words such as: "network", "centre", "association", "institute", while in reality it operates alone, and often gives inaccurate information about the place of publication; the United States or European countries are obviously popular, while it turns out that the editorial office of the journal is located in India, for example.

5

The publisher copies or clearly imitates the titles of its magazines in relation to others, which can lead to a mistaken selection of a predatory magazine. A special case of predatory journals are those that pretend to be well-known periodicals - all the information about identifiers, indexing or bibliometric indices on the site is genuine, while the site itself has nothing to do with the journal. One of the most well-known examples is the prestigious magazine *Wulfenia* and the website that impersonates this magazine:

<https://www.multidisciplinarywulfenia.org/>



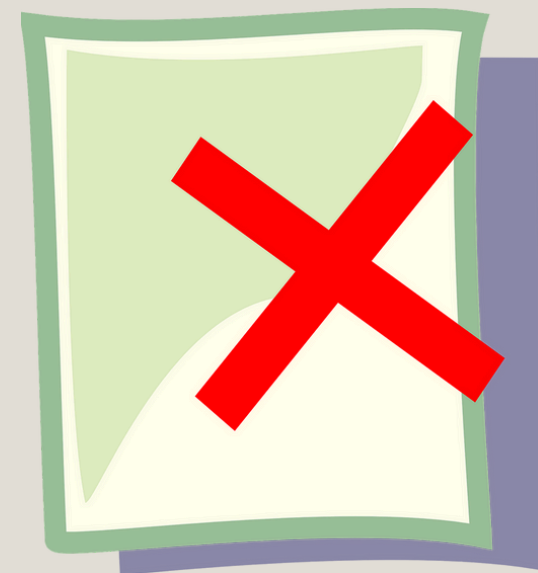
*Viewpoint
of the National
Science Centre
(Polish short NCN)*



The National Science Centre wants to draw the attention especially of young scientists and PhD students to the phenomenon of predatory journals. The definition of a predatory magazine was accepted as a:

a journal in which the scientific work published is not subject to peer review or is carried out to a very low standard. These journals have the character of publishing houses publishing in so-called open access, they often offer their services at elevated prices, with a short publication process.

NCN does not approve of this type of practice and warns that in situations where it can be established with certainty that an NCN-funded article has been published in a journal that does not adhere to the standards of peer review, it will require the project manager to remove the project number from the publication and consequently exclude it from the report and return the costs expended to publish such a paper.



Decisions in doubtful cases will be taken on a case-by-case basis by the Panel of Experts evaluating the project reports. Experts will be appointed by the Council for a period of one year to evaluate the reports in so-called permanent panels. The members of the teams will not be announced publicly, only the names of the team chairmen will be made public.



Letter from the Director of NCN
Prof. Zbigniew Błocki, 18.09.2018.

https://ncn.gov.pl/sites/default/files/pliki/2018_09_18_list_dyrektora_ncn_ws_predatory_journals.pdf



How to verify
a journal

Journal Impact Factor (JIF)

NEVER take the IF information given on the publisher's/journal's website for granted. Dishonest publishers often use terms like:

Global Impact Factor, 5 Year Journal Impact Factor, Journal Impact Factor, Science Impact factor, Unofficial Impact Factor.

The **ONLY** source that reports IF rates is the *Journal Citation Reports*[®] (JCR) database from *Clarivate Analytics*.



**Clarivate
Analytics**

Indexing in approved databases

Another method is to check whether the journal is indexed in *Scopus* or *Web of Science* databases. If the journal you are looking for is not indexed in these databases, it is necessary to analyse the content of its official website yourself in order to assess whether there is a risk that you are dealing with a predatory journal. You should then check the criteria that the title must meet, to be considered unsafe. This was discussed on slides 16-17.

If a journal is listed in the database, check whether the articles published on its website are also indexed, in order to protect yourself from a website impersonating a reputable journal.



Journals with ministerial credit, without IF

Check whether the title is on the list of the current MEiN list
- the latest list has been announced

With the communication from the Minister of Education and Science of 21 December 2021 amending and correcting the communication on the list of scientific journals and peer-reviewed proceedings of international conferences



**Ministerstwo
Edukacji i Nauki**

As an additional
option, you can use
the tips provided
in the service
Think.Check.Submit.

The initiative's guidelines are published under a CC BY
licence at: <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/>



Identify trusted publishers for your research

Through a range of **tools and practical resources**, this international, cross-sector initiative aims to **educate researchers, promote integrity, and build trust in credible research and publications.**

Books & Chapters ➔

Journals ➔



! Think

Are you submitting your research to a trusted journal or publisher? Is it the right journal or book for your work?

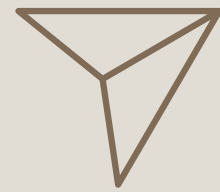
✓ Check

Use our check list to assess the journal or publisher.

➔ Submit

Only if you can answer 'yes' to the questions on our check list.

Firstly: THINK



Do you submit your article
to a reputable journal?



Is this the right journal
for your text?

Secondly: CHECK

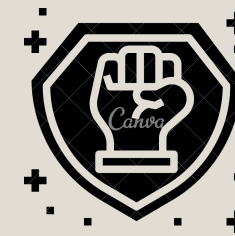
- Is it easy to find the latest papers from this journal?
- Is it easy to identify and contact the publisher?
- Does the journal explicitly indicate which type of peer review is used?
- Is the journal indexed in the databases you use?
- Is it clearly indicated what fee will be charged?
- Are the members of the editorial board known?



Thirdly: SEND



If you have answered "Yes."
to most or all of the above
questions, you can submit a paper
to the journal in question.



You just need to be sure that the chosen journal
is properly perceived by your colleagues.
This is a requirement of it,
that your paper will work for your reputation
and for your chances of getting citations.



Publishing research
in good journals will increase
the level of your professional CV
and help speed up your career.



To make a paper easy to find,
it should be indexed
and correctly archived.

Only after fulfilling these conditions can an article
be submitted to the journal of your choice.



Also, it is advisable to look for discussions in the forums on *ResearchGate*.

Researchers there share their experiences with the process of reviewing and publishing scientific papers.

