

A Step-Change in the Recognition of Women in Antarctic Science

Information Paper

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Most science programmes explicitly prohibited women from working in Antarctica until at least the late 1950s, over half a century after the first male scientists in 1898. Since then we have seen dramatic changes such that women scientists have now risen to prominent positions, including directorships of the British Antarctic Survey and Alfred Wegener Institute. Furthermore, sixty percent of polar early career researchers are now women. Nevertheless, they are still under-represented in official recognition (*e.g.* Polar Medals), and public awareness (*e.g.* Wikipedia biographies).

A committee was initiated to use the openly-editable Wikipedia to provide visible role models for all Antarctic scientists and people interested in Antarctic science. This was approached through engagement of multiple communities from all seven continents to generate a critical mass of Wikipedia biographies. This step-change in submissions gets called a “WikiBomb”. Through the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research, the community was asked to nominate notable women. Following from this, nearly 40 volunteers were brought together and developed a collaborative research-writing-editing-submission pipeline for each biography. While Wikipedia is “openly editable”, it has a rigorous review process. The WikiBomb initiative received significant support from the Women in Red Wikiproject, which helped the submissions navigate the Wikipedia review process.

The first phase of the initiative was overwhelmingly successful. Over a 4-month period, the number of biographies for Antarctic female researchers has increased ten-fold from a pre-WikiBomb count of 10. Five women scientists have been profiled on the encyclopaedia's front page, including the first woman to set foot on the mainland, and the first to lead an all-woman science team. Media coverage of the initiative has been extensive and international. This initial phase culminated in a celebratory session at the 2016 SCAR Meeting in Kuala Lumpur with over 350 attendees. Furthermore at the meeting the initiative was specifically mentioned in speeches by Malaysia's Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (Wilfred Madius Tangau), SCAR president (Jerónimo López-Martínez), SCAR Medal winners (Francisco Hervé and Robert Dunbar).



Fig. 1. Jan Strugnell and Thomas Shafee in front of Wikibomb Banner (above) and during Wikibomb presentation at SCAR meeting at Kuala Lumpur 2016 (below).