Biogeography—the study of all patterns in geographic variation, from the characteristics of individuals to those of communities, ecosystems and biotas of entire regions, continents and ocean basins—is arguably one of the most inclusive and integrative disciplines of all the natural sciences. Yet we as biogeographers are no less subject to the siren’s call and, more pragmatically, the tenure- and promotion-related pressures to publish in quantity than are our colleagues in other fields. At least in some academic circles, a book, monograph or extensive review paper is deemed no more significant than are more focused research articles. This disincentive from publishing a more limited number of expanded works clearly flies in the face of the continuing and, we believe, intensifying calls for reintegration of biogeography (e.g. Lomolino and Heaney 2004, pp. 1–3). Perhaps compounding this is the lack of any outlet for expanded reviews and monographs specific to biogeography.

A limited review of the bibliography of one of the current biogeography texts (Lomolino et al. 2010) reveals over 35 monographs and over 90 reviews on biogeography and related subjects, many of these being seminal or otherwise important works that strongly influenced the development of our field (Table 1). Perhaps most notable among these are the reviews and monographs by Philip Darlington (1938) and Sherwin Carlquist (1966) on long-distance dispersal and insular biotas, by Robert MacArthur and Edward Wilson (1967) articulating their equilibrium theory of island biogeography, and on geographic gradients and clines in species and ecological communities by John Endler (1977), Howard Odum (1957), Eric Pianka (1966), Robert MacArthur (1965) and Robert H. Whittaker (1967). Not one of the works listed in Table 1, however, was published in a biogeography journal, the main reason simply being that such expansive works do not fit the format of these journals.

Despite the deep history (including the seminal works of Darwin, Wallace and von Humboldt) and continuing influence of monographs in book form, and the sustained success of expanded-format journal publication series (e.g. Ecological Monographs, Quarterly Review of Biology and Annual Reviews), the trend over recent decades has been toward shorter and shorter articles. The pitfalls of this include relegating much of the otherwise essential descriptions of methods and detailed results to supplementary material (SM). It is now common in biogeography for the SM to be very lengthy, often longer than the paper itself. It can be helpful, particularly for non-specialists, for the more technical details to be omitted from the main text, but available if required (i.e. in the SM; Nature and Science are good examples). But when biogeographers are writing for biogeographers, we often have to read SM in parallel with the main paper in order to make sense of the research. What of the quality? The SM is typically much less rigorously peer reviewed, if at all, and is rarely scrutinised by copy-editors. Often it is much longer than it needs to be: ironically, in the drive for brevity, the result is often long-winded, rambling and inaccurate passages in the SM, taking much longer to interpret (or give up on) than a properly scrutinised, longer paper.

The pitfalls also include salami slicing—splitting what should have been one extensive, integrative thesis into bite-sized, partially redundant articles, where the now disarticulated contributions just don’t sum up (see also Marhold and Stuessy 2013). We shudder to imagine MacArthur and Wilson being forced to publish their seminal monograph in eight separate papers (i.e. one for each chapter). It is worth noting that Robert MacArthur, recognizing the value of integrative reviews and monographs, was instrumental in establishing the distinguished series Monographs in Population Biology, becoming its inaugural editor with its first contribution being The Theory of Island Biogeography (MacArthur and Wilson, 1967).

The International Biogeography Society and, in particular, the editors of Frontiers of Biogeography have decided to follow MacArthur’s lead and
Table 1. A far-from-exhaustive sample of influential monographs and reviews in biogeography and related disciplines published over the past century. It includes many of the seminal works in our field.


encourage more expanded contributions specific to biogeography by modifying the journal’s format to include monographs and expanded reviews in biogeography. In talking to colleagues, we have increasingly noticed the desire for an outlet in biogeography for substantial articles that would suffer if shoe-horned into 5,000 to 7,000 words, but which do not merit an entire book. In response to this, the journal’s management team will accept submissions of monograph-sized contributions, beginning immediately, and is now amending the Instructions for Authors to include this important expansion of format. In the meantime, if you have ideas, suggestions, or questions regarding monographs, including how to submit them, please contact the editorial board at frontiersofbiogeography@gmail.com.

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References not in Table 1