February 12, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

I apologize for the recent outage. We are back online, (obviously) and believe that we have fixed the problems. If you happen to find any glitches or bugs, I would be grateful if you would send a report to:

Support@JPET.net.

For those of you how happen to be interested knowing what happened, here is the story. Some time around August or September, we somehow got a malware infection that we think may have come from a trusted source or a compromised administrator account. By November, the malware had gained access to our mail service and started to send out spam. You may have noticed that we began to appear on email blacklists. Through December, the techs at our ISP and myself tried increasingly aggressive measures to disinfect the system, but the malware seemed to have installed itself in the boot sector and was able to reinstalled itself each time we thought we had cut it out.

If any of you have ever owned an old used car, you are familiar with the optimal stopping problem. At what point is it best to discontinue efforts to fix something and instead start with something new? We eventually gave up hope that we could fix the system while maintaining continuous operations. Thus, decided to shut the current server down and build a new one.

It took more days than we might have hoped to establish and harden the new server. Although the submission and other data came through this essentially undamaged and complete, our code and systems applications were not so fortunate. The good news is that we had several backups. The bad news is that finding the undamaged versions of each application and program and then making them work smoothly together was difficult and time consuming. We also had to be very careful as we moved files to the new server to make sure we did not bring any of the infection along.

There are few subsystems that are still not working correctly, but there are not mission critical. We thought it would be better to bring the new server online sooner rather than latter and finish patching up these details over the next couple of weeks. The new server is better and we have done a full security review to protect the system from future attacks. I hope we never have to go through this again.

In any event, thank you very much for your patience and understanding. It is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

John P. Conley