

The first ever joint conference of the Society for Ecological Restoration Australasia (SERA) and the New Zealand Ecological Society (NZES) was held from 19 November to 23 November 2016 at the Claudelands Event Centre, Hamilton, New Zealand. More than 400 delegates attended including 88 students.

A broad ranging programme allowed the breadth of research and practice which characterises both organisations to be canvassed but also gave opportunities, through dedicated symposia, to focus in on more specialised topics. The cross-ecosystem and cross-discipline coverage of the programme was greater than we normally see. And, for the first time ever, we provided a special strand on Sunday 20 November for community groups and volunteers, so crucial to conservation and restoration, to participate in the conference and encourage stronger dialogue between researchers, managers and practitioners. Some 130 community group members attended.

Preconference field trips and workshops began on Saturday 19 November along with a student conference that included student presentations and professional training sessions.

Each day of the conference featured morning and afternoon plenary sessions with no fewer than 10 keynote speakers (see below) giving the most up-to-date insights into the state of knowledge in their area of interest and expertise.

Margaret Lowman: Citizens and Communities, Canopies and Conservation – innovation required for Mother Nature!
Wendy Henwood: Iwi Māori led approaches to restoration and enhancement of fresh water environments in the Far North, New Zealand
Alan Featherstone: Restoring the Caledonian Forest in Scotland
Kingsley Dixon: Beyond flag waving – Raising the standard in ecological restoration
Laura Molles: Tūi and tea parties: adventures in community-based conservation
Saul Cunningham: Ecologists know that human welfare depends on nature, but what do the humans think?
Myla Aronson: Biodiversity in the concrete jungle: Understanding nature in cities for a resilient future
Ross Thompson: Building a better mousetrap: Restoration, remediation and re-engineering natural systems for resilience
Jacqueline Beggs: Restoration and diversity in ecology
Kevin Prime: Kaitiakitanga

The conference dinner provided an excellent opportunity to socialise with fellow delegates as well as recognise the excellent work going on at the individual researcher and project level with the presentation of a range of awards by SERA and NZES (see below).

SERA award winners were:

Award for Individual Excellence in Restoration:

Di Carter – Port Hills Ranger, Christchurch City Council, New Zealand
 Sam Archer - Kincora farm, Gundagai NSW, Australia.

Student Award:

Cayne Layton – University of Tasmania

Awards for Excellence in Restoration Practice:

Projects below 50ha:

The Waterways - Mordialloc Creek, Victoria

Projects above 50 ha:

Motuora Island – New Zealand.

Motutapu Island – New Zealand

Big Scrub Landcare – NSW Australia

Dr Tein McDonald was awarded the **SERA inaugural award for individual excellence** for her outstanding leadership in the development of the National Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration in Australasia, leading to the creation of the first International Standards

NZES award winners were:

Honorary Life Membership

Shona Myers

Te Tohu Taiao - Award for Ecological Excellence

Peter Bellingham, Landcare Research

Ecology in Action Award

Chris Green, Department of Conservation

Outstanding Publication on New Zealand Ecology

Janet Wilmshurst, Landcare Research for the paper:

Wilmshurst JM, Moar NT, Wood JR, Bellingham PJ, Findlater AM, Robinson JJ and Stone C 2013. Use of pollen and ancient DNA as conservation baselines for offshore islands in New Zealand.

Conservation Biology 28(1): 202-212.

Best Publication by a New Researcher

Rachel Buxton, University of Otago for the paper: Buxton, R., Taylor, G., Jones, C. Lyver, P.O., Moller, H. Cree, A. and Towns, D. (2016) Spatio-temporal changes in density and distribution of burrow-nesting seabird colonies after rat eradication. New Zealand Journal of Ecology 40(1): 88-99.

Best Student Conference Paper

Ellen Irwin, Victoria University

Josie Galbraith, University of Auckland

Timothy Staples, University of Queensland

Eduardo Burmeister, University of Canterbury

Bridgette Farnsworth, University of Waikato

Best Student Conference Poster

Akane Tsujita, Kyoto University

Craig Simpkins, University of Auckland

The nine field trips on the final day of the conference (see below) provided a unique opportunity to see some of the ecosystem diversity of the Waikato and the excellent restoration work being undertaken across the region.

1. Maungatautari Ecological Island
2. Urban Restoration, Hamilton
3. Pukorokoro/Miranda Bird Sanctuary
4. Waitomo Caves
5. Whatawhata Sustainable Hill Land Management
6. Hobbiton Tour

7. Lake Rotopiko/Serpentine Peat Lake
8. Torehape Restiad Bog Restoration
9. Waikato Expressway, Huntly Section

The conference would not have been possible without the strong support of our sponsors, the work of our local organising committee and our event manager, Lea Boodee (and her team) from On-Cue in Nelson. The support from our four principal sponsors – the University of Waikato, the Biological Heritage National Science Challenge, Waikato Regional Council and the Living Water Fonterra-DOC Partnership – together with our many other sponsors was crucial in making Ecology and Restoration Australasia 2016 possible. It is hoped that this conference will mark the beginning of a strong partnership between SERA and NZES.

Bruce Clarkson (Conference chair) on behalf of the organising committee