

New Zealand Ecological Society Conference

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A short report from a John Nicholl's Memorial Research Grant recipient is presented. The research contributes to an MSc thesis, with publication following.

During the first week of December, the John Nicholls Memorial Research Grant from the Rotorua Botanical Society allowed me to attend the New Zealand Ecological Society Conference in Lincoln. For the past 18 months, I have been researching drivers of urban forest restoration success for my Master's thesis as part of the People Cities and Nature research programme at the University of Waikato. My research combines a social and ecological approach to explore the link between research and implementation in urban restoration projects, and factors influencing the regeneration of native trees. It was the chapter focusing on this first part that I decided to present at the conference. I think it's important to understand why research and implementation are not always well linked in restoration projects, and who better to share my findings with, than a group of scientists who are looking for better ways to effectively transfer their research findings to practitioners. Ensuring that restoration practice is informed by up-to-date science is particularly important to ensure that restored forests are sustainable and regenerate over time in altered urban environments, and subsequently that people who live in cities get to appreciate and enjoy Aotearoa's unique plant life in their backyard. I was pleased to get some good questions from the audience, and very grateful to have the chance to attend the conference and share my work!



Figure 1. First time presenting at a conference!

The abstract for my conference presentation is included here. I am currently in the process of submitting the manuscript my presentation was based on for publication.

Conference abstract:

A tenuous link: information transfer between ecological research and restoration practice

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Despite a growing theoretical understanding of restoration ecology, this scientific knowledge is not well linked to practitioner decision-making. This weak link between research and implementation is detrimental to restoration project success, yet how it manifests in an urban context is unknown. We conducted a nation-wide survey of urban forest restoration practitioners to examine their perspectives regarding planning, implementation, and management of urban forest restoration projects. Our goals were to 1) understand current trends in practitioner decision making 2) identify specific weak links in knowledge transfer between ecological theory and practice, and 3) suggest targeted methods to improve information transfer between restoration researchers and practitioners. We found a tenuous link between practitioner actions and current best-practice restoration knowledge. When restoring, practitioners tend to prioritise actions like planting or weed control over other vital elements such as project planning and quantifiable monitoring. Additionally, project objectives are commonly broad, vague, and focused on restoration of simple ecosystem components such a canopy of indigenous primary successional species. Our results show that practitioners value interactions with ecology experts and fellow practitioners equally to more traditional forms of best-practice communication (e.g. scientific articles) as sources of restoration knowledge. This indicates that prioritising interactive, interpersonal modes of communication and encouraging collaborative partnerships between researchers and practitioners will strengthen the knowledge transfer link. Additionally, providing practitioners with time saving resources (e.g. restoration plan and monitoring templates) and training on how to navigate the range of socio-ecological constraints that arise in urban settings will help improve urban restoration.