

CAWS Travel Award Report 2013

Thank you to the Council of Australasian Weed Societies (CAWS) for providing support allowing me to attend EcoTas13, the combined 5th joint conference of the New Zealand Ecological Society and the Ecology Society of Australia, Aotea Centre, New Zealand, 24-29 November 2013.

The conference, which is held every four years, attracted scientists and land managers presenting on different areas of ecological research and management. Principle themes were, invasive species in a changing world, ecological genetics, modelling of the impacts of climate change on habitats and species and ecosystem functioning to mention a few.

Keynote speaker, Professor Chris Thomas (University of York) highlighted evidence of changing species distributions due to rapid environmental change and the challenges to conventional conservation thinking and strategies to prevent species extinctions.

I presented both a poster and a talk titled ***“Investigating invasion potential of blackberry in native vegetation in Australia using species distribution modelling (SDM) techniques”*** which was well received.

The conference not only provided me with the opportunity to interact with key people involved in biodiversity management and restoration but also to participate in a workshop titled ***“Invasive species in a changing world: are we asking the right questions?”*** Discussion centred on identifying gaps in the understanding and knowledge of invasive species ecology and biology in introduced ranges, and particularly, the management and community involvement in management programmes.

Some key points synthesized:

- *a need for better social engagement in invasive species research (both in communication of outcomes and collaboration to influence social attitudes)*
- *expand the understanding of the function of novel ecosystems created by invasive species*
- *develop more fine scale knowledge of the biology and ecology of invasive species generated by including more mechanistic or trait biology studies using species distribution modelling techniques under a changing climate scenario*
- *expanding the understanding of microbial systems where invasive species are introduced using fine scale modelling techniques*
- *develop models at finer scale to enable targeted management of invasive species*
- *more effective implementation of research findings into management systems*

Overall CAWS provided me with an excellent opportunity to attend this conference, which expanded my knowledge on invasive species management and research.

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