

# **Report on NEOBiota: 7<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Biological Invasions**

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With support from the CAWS Student Travel Award, I recently was able to attend the NEOBiota conference. NEOBiota is an international conference held every two years, focusing on all aspects of biological invasions including impacts, management, ecology, and evolution, mainly in Europe. The conference is organised by NEOBiota, the European Group on Biological Invasions, and this year was hosted by the GEIB Grupo Especialista en Invasiones Biológicas. The conference was held in Pontevedra, a small town in the Galicia region of Spain, from 12 to 15 September, and had approximately 300 delegates from Europe as well as from all over the world attending.

Keynote talks at this year's conference included international experts from Australia, South Africa and USA, giving talks highly relevant to my current research, with topics such as combining climate-based niche models with simple spread models (D. Kriticos), and managing invasive trees (D. M. Richardson). There were also ten sessions addressing a large variety of topics, where in particular the session on modelling the success of alien species and the session on climate change interactions with biological invasions were of great interest to me. Learning about new modelling tools and experts' opinions on current best methodology was very helpful for my own work on modelling weed distributions. Furthermore, other topics included weed risk assessment, alien species databases, species traits conferring invasiveness and biological control of weeds. On the last day of the conference, an excursion to Cíes Islands gave me a perspective on local weed issues and management.

I presented a poster at the conference, bringing a New Zealand perspective on global weed issues. The poster was entitled: "Predicting weeds in a changing climate: are bioclimatic models validated by field trials?" The poster combined results from the first two chapters of my PhD thesis focusing on distribution modelling of recently naturalised weeds in New Zealand, together with preliminary results of my main field experiment. The poster was well received, and in particular, positive feedback was given for the approach of combining models with field data, as this is rarely done. I was able to address all queries raised by the audience with confidence, and benefitted from discussions with various experts on my research topic.

Long lunch breaks, the conference dinner and the excursion provided excellent networking opportunities at the conference. Moreover, I had the opportunity to meet several weed scientists whose work I have extensively studied for my thesis, and learned about which institutes have a research focus similar to my own research interests. This networking set the groundwork for potential collaborations and future employment opportunities. This was of great benefit as I am hoping to get a postdoctoral fellowship in weed science either in Australasia or Europe after completion of my PhD.

Overall, the conference gave me a broad insight into current weed research carried out in Europe as well as internationally, allowed me to broadcast my own research, and gave me the opportunity to meet international experts on biological invasions, paving the way for future collaborations.