More information including all registration and symposia details can be found on the ESA website at www.ecolsoc.org.au and following the links. More information about the post graduate day can be found at www.bio.mq.edu.au/ecology/ESA2005/

Another upcoming conference of ecological mention is the Veg Futures 2006 Conference from 19–23 March in Albury-Wodonga (on the Victoria/New South Wales border). It is being held by Greening Australia (see www.greeningaustralia.org.au) in partnership with Land & Water Australia, CSIRO, the Joint Venture Agroforestry Program, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the Department of the Environment and Heritage. It will have a focus on practical demonstrations by researchers and landholders, and will be suitable for policy makers, direct seeders and anyone in vegetation management across Australia. For further details check out Greening Australia's website, or contact Haydn Burgess on hburgess@greeningaustralia.org.au.

Last year the University of Melbourne joined with Victorias Department of Sustainability and Environment to create the School of Forest and Ecosystem Science. It is based in Creswick (Victoria) and undertakes teaching and research in a broad range of disciplines all relating to environmental management. Within the school, the Bushfire Research and Development Group researches issues relating to fire management and ecology. Two such projects are being undertaken by post-doctoral fellows Karl Brennan and Fiona Christie, who are looking at soil and litter ecosystem functions following a fire, and ecological processes in the understory. Madeleine Osborn is studying a similar project on fungal diversity and related processes after fire. For more information on all the groups projects and publications, see their website at www.forestscience.unimelb.edu.au/research/bushfire/index.html, or email Alan York (alan.york@unimelb.edu.au) or Melinda Moir (mmoir@unimelb.edu.au).

That's all from me this time, but more details of the ESA and its members can be found on our website, www.ecolsoc.org.au or by emailing me on rsinclai@bio.mq.edu.au.

Robyn Sinclair

Robyn is a New Zealander currently living across the Tasman. She is completing her Masters with Lesley Hughes at Macquarie University in Sydney, working on the evolutionary ecology of leaf mining insects www.ecolsoc.org.au/What%20we%20do/Prizes/documents/RobynSinclairPoster.pdf

ECOLOGY STUCK ON THE WEB

3: Dr. Google

With tools like Google's search engine (www.google.com), the whole messy world of the internet (or at least most of it) is almost instantly at our finger tips. I'm still amazed by Google's magical ability to list useful links first. The problem is that a lot of web information is not terribly reliable. It is hard enough teaching undergraduates not to trust everything they read in the newspaper or hear on TV. The internet magnifies nonsense a thousand fold.

When I'm searching for reliable information in my research (the polar opposite of www.theonion.com), I have traditionally begun by searching for published scientific papers using a library citation database like Web of Science or CAB Abstracts. These let me search through just the scientific literature. One problem with these otherwise excellent services is that they cost a lot.

Or, rather, the problem is that because they cost a lot, they are not widely available. Even a small academic institution like Lincoln University can only afford to subscribe to Web of Science back to 1993 (its science citation index is now available, at a price, back to 1900). Another problem is coverage. The Web of Science may index about 8,700 top journals but it still misses many of the smaller, independently published, publications like the New Zealand Entomologist.

Enter Google, stage right. Google has swept into a scene previously dominated by expensive services with its free Google Scholar service (scholar.google.com). While still in development (as Google Scholar Beta), it is already online and is already very useful. While I still use services like Web of Science to exhaustively search the big journals for recent literature, I now find myself going to Google Scholar first for most of my searches.

Google Scholar has four advantages over our local library services. It allows me to go back in time further than our library can afford to do with the Web of Science. It includes the New Zealand Entomologist and other smaller, independent publications (as well as book chapters, reports and other online science publications). Like the regular Google search engine, it indexes the full contents of online PDF articles so you'll find something even if it is not mentioned in the title or abstract. And it's free. Ecologists not based at research or academic institutions can now search the scientific literature.

To give you a feel for the difference between Google and Google Scholar, here's an example. Let's say if I wanted to know about garden weeds in New Zealand. When I type "garden weed zealand" into Google, the first of 420,000 hits is for a New Zealand mail order nursery declaring that "a weed is but an unloved

flower." The top ten hits are New Zealand gardening websites talking about weed control, except for one DOC webpage.

In contrast, when I type the same search phrase into Google Scholar, I get 2,680 scientific publications. Among the top ten hits are two DOC weed reports, two New Zealand Journal of Ecology articles on weed ecology, a book chapter on New Zealand weed eradication, and a review of Roy et al.'s excellent book, "An illustrated guide to common weeds of New Zealand".

So if it's science you want, check out Google Scholar. (For those of you already using Google Scholar, you might like to try www.randomwebsite.com. The result will be a lot less relevant.)

Jon Sullivan
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NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Peter Williams: new Honorary Life Member of New Zealand Ecological Society 2005

Peter Williams has been a member of the New Zealand Ecological Society member for 41 years, during which time he has attended most Ecol Soc conferences and regularly presented papers. Not just a member, Peter has served on council for 10 years, been Vice president for 1 year, conference convenor 1 year, and been on the editorial board of New Zealand Journal of Ecology for 6 years. But the impressive statistics don't stop there. Peter has been a practising researcher for 35 years, with Landcare Research and its precursor DSIR Botany Division. Over that time Peter has been a highly productive scientist, both in terms of topics researched as well as projects brought to completion and published—he has over 70 refereed scientific publications.

As a student Peter was heavily involved in the environmental movement. Indeed he was the only student representative at the first UN world conference on the environment in Stockholm. At that conference Peter saw a display on the science behind environmental issues. Our rabid pro-native ecologist made a pivotal decision to get into science rather than further involved in environmental politics. Eric Godley, then Director of Botany Division, DSIR was pleased with Peter's decision and offered him a job saying "for a while we thought we had lost you".

Peter, a true ecologist, has worked on a variety of aspects of plant ecology; earlier on tussock grasslands, threatened plants, conservation assessment of vegetation landscapes, relationships between vegetation and geology and latterly on weeds. Peter is recognised as a prominent scientist in weed ecology in New Zealand, indeed "Mr Weeds". His weed work has been especially focused on the ecology of invasive plants of conservation concern with topics ranging from autecological studies of new weeds, patterns of weed invasions, the role of birds in weed dispersal, the role of people in creating and distributing weeds, and the interactions between native and naturalised plants.

Peter's weed work has often been done in association with others such as Department of Conservation scientists and field managers. The results of these projects have often been translated by Peter into popular articles for Forest & Bird magazine or Protect or presented at workshops and meetings such as Biosecurity Institute seminars.

In the last few years Peter has conducted several collaborative research projects with weed ecologists in, for example, Australia and South Africa. He has also had several invitations to work in other countries helping them to establish weed risk assessment systems. So, Peter is now aiding and saving not only New Zealand native species but also those of other countries with the introduction and refinement of the weed risk assessment system Peter helped develop.

The Society has twin objectives of promoting the study of ecology and the application of ecological knowledge in all its aspects. Peter's career has been a fine example of doing both those things. For that, and in recognition of Peter's many contributions to ecology, we confer honorary life membership of New Zealand Ecological Society.

Susan Timmins
Vice President

David Given, Te Tohu Taiao Award for Ecological Excellence 2005

For many years, David Given has been a researcher, strategic planner, administrator and communicator. He has specialised in studies of biological diversity, conservation biology, taxonomy and ecology, ethno botany, and the sustainable use of natural resources. He has a strong belief in the fundamental place of nature in people's lives and the role of landscapes and biological diversity in a contributing sense of place and belonging for people.

David graduated with First Class Honours in Botany from Canterbury University and went on to complete a PhD on the taxonomy of *Celmisia* (Asteraceae). For many years he was in charge of the DSIR Herbarium and more recently he has been a lecturer at Lincoln University and has played a significant role in the work of the Isaac Centre for Nature Conservation. It came as no surprise to his friends and colleagues when he was recently appointed Botanical Services Curator for Christchurch City Council.