

Student awards – 2006 Conference

The quality of student spoken papers and posters was of an extremely high standard at the Auckland conference, making judging very difficult. Congratulations to the recipients of the following awards:

The award for **best spoken paper in the 'Conservation' category** went to Jennifer Germano, for her paper: *A review on amphibian and reptile re-introductions, translocations, and supplementations* (Jennifer Germano and Phillip Bishop).

The award for **best spoken paper in the 'Wildlife Management' category** went to James Russell, for his paper (see article in this newsletter): *Experimental introduction of rats to islands – what have we learnt?* (James Russell, Dave Towns and Mick Clout).

Special mentions for spoken papers were awarded to: Tara Leech, Jasmin Ferguson, Monica Rubal, Maria Cardosa, Emily Hynes and Emily Miller.

The best posters were awarded to:

1st place - Michelle Wilson for her poster: *Fertility control of eastern grey kangaroos in semi-urban parks in Victoria: and application of deslorelin implants.* (Michelle Wilson, Terry Fletcher and Graeme Coulson).

2nd place - Hannah Nicholas for her poster: *Conservation biology of the threatened Growling Grass Frog Litoria raniformis* (Hannah Nicholas and Graeme Coulson).

The Society would like to thank CSIRO publishing, Manaaki Whenua Press and the Society for Conservation Biology for kindly donating student paper and poster award prizes.

Winning student paper by James Russell



Experimental introduction of rats to islands – what have we learnt?

Invasive rats are a big problem for island conservation. They have colonized over 80% of the world's island groups. Eradication has restored nearly 50,000ha of island habitat around the world to rat-free status, but rats are still persisting to invade rat-free islands. Very little is known about how individual rats and populations behave immediately

following colonisation of a rat-free island. We have detailed descriptions of some recent island invasions which have been very difficult to prevent, for a combination of biological and management reasons. Scientists in New Zealand have advocated for the release of radio-collared rats on to rat-free islands for over 15 years but only recently has this actually been possible (i.e. once we were 100% confident in our ability to eradicate introduced rats).

My PhD research released radio-collared adult male Norway rats onto small forested rat-free islands in northern New Zealand. I presented the final results from this to the AWMS conference in Auckland. Rats remain around landing sites for a few days, before sometimes embarking on much longer distance movements in the order of kilometres. They expand their range size beyond what has usually been observed at high density. The behaviour of rats changes at low density, due to the absence of conspecifics, which rats may well be searching for. This directly affects management as devices must be spaced appropriately, and must be made appealing to rats that are not limited by food, but may be searching for other rats. The work was funded by the New Zealand Department of Conservation and been implemented in their Best Practice manual. Additional work in the PhD focused on applying genetic methods to low-density populations, and investigating recently invaded islands from both an ecological and genetic perspective.

For more info you can check out my webpage <http://www.stat.auckland.ac.nz/~jrussell>



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