

# THE CAPACITY OF URBAN RESTORED FORESTS TO SUPPORT NATIVE BIRDS

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Photo by Huatoki Native Plant Nursery.

**M**y ongoing PhD research combines ecological and social science to evaluate the contribution that restored native forests in New Zealand cities can make to native bird conservation and reconnecting urban residents with nature. The goal is to identify which factors among local habitat variables, landscape characteristics, site age and predation, determine the ability of native New Zealand bush birds to benefit from urban restoration.

**B**irds and predators were monitored at 42 sites in two North Island cities: Hamilton and New Plymouth. Sites represented three types of urban forest: unrestored ( $n = 6$ ), restored ( $n = 26$ ) remnant ( $n = 6$ ), and the non-urban forest remnant nearest to each city ( $n = 6$ ). Restored sites formed an age gradient of 1 to 73 years since initial planting.

**P**reliminary results reveal a trend for native bird species' richness to

increase with the age of restored sites. The number of native bush bird species in Hamilton and New Plymouth is low (6 detected). Bird communities appear to shift from being dominated by non-native finches during the early stages of restoration, to supporting a greater number of native bush birds as the sites mature.

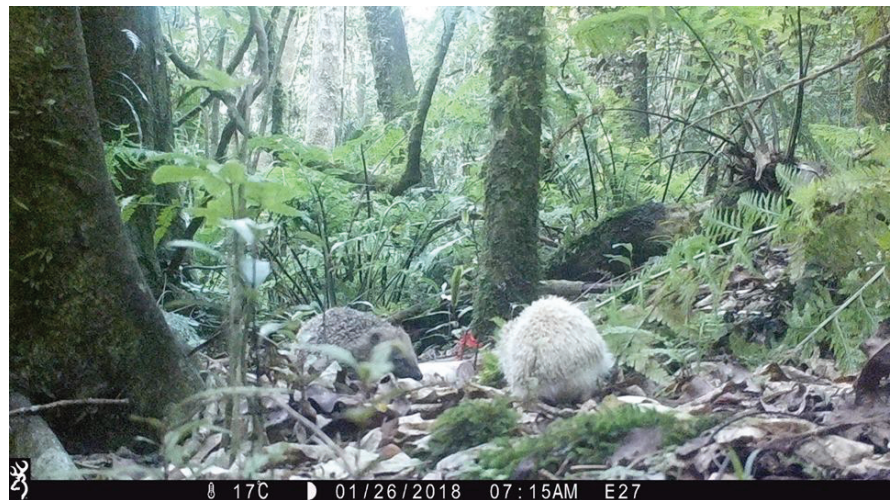
**T**he qualitative, semi-structured interviews explored whether frequent use of restored forest can

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re-establish a relationship between people and native nature. Results reveal that parks dominated by native vegetation are valued for the opportunity they provide for observing nature and escaping the stresses of city life. Interviewees' appreciation of native nature was ambiguous and complex, however, and reported preferences for native vegetation and birds did not result in increased plantings of native species in respondents' gardens. Our findings suggest that we cannot rely on urban gardens to support native biodiversity in the short term and stress the need for local authorities to invest more time and resources in urban restoration.

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*Figure 1. Predators detected using camera traps included cats, ship rats, possums and hedgehogs.*