

THE CAPACITY OF RESTORED URBAN FORESTS TO SUPPORT NATIVE BIRDS

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Photo by Jason Hosking.

Urban restoration may perform the dual role of creating refugia for native flora and fauna, and green-spaces where city residents can benefit from daily interaction with nature. Our 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 urbanites with nature.

We monitored birds at 43 sites in Hamilton and New Plymouth. Sites represented three types of

urban forest: unrestored ($n = 6$), restored ($n = 26$) remnant ($n = 6$), and rural forest remnants nearest to each city ($n = 6$). Restored sites formed an age gradient of 1 to 72 years since initial planting. Using qualitative interviews, we explored Hamilton residents' perceptions and experiences of urban nature in parks and gardens.

Results of the qualitative study identified a gap between what residents claim to value and their actions affecting native biodiversity,

suggesting we cannot currently rely on private gardens to provide adequate resources for native birds. This research highlights, however, the unique contribution that native forest parks make to human wellbeing and sense of place. Ecological restoration in cities therefore has great potential to enrich human lives.

Results of the ecological study demonstrate that urban forest restoration increases native bird species richness and diversity over time and transforms the bird community from



Photo by Jason Hosking.

being dominated by introduced granivores and generalists, to one dominated by native forest birds. This research indicates, moreover, that lack of habitat is an important factor limiting native forest birds in New Zealand's North Island cities. Current restoration efforts were found to benefit widespread, common native forest birds, but greater investments in predator control or eradication will be needed to re-create forests capable of supporting bird species of conservation concern.

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