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## Introducing Fiona Hall

*Fiona Hall was appointed as Assistant Coordinator in ANPC's National Office at the end of July. She comes to Australia from the UK, and has a background in both wildlife conservation and editing. Here she introduces herself:*

I come to ANPC fresh from 'the field', as my last job in the UK before accompanying my husband to Canberra was as Wildlife Sites Officer for a county Wildlife Trust. There I worked with the owners and managers of a vast array of remnant vegetation sites, ranging from wildflower-rich grasslands to ancient woodlands and roadside verges, providing management advice and help with grant schemes. The job also involved helping implement species Recovery Plans — for example, for the beautiful but threatened Cornflower, *Centaurea cyanus*, an arable wildflower now reduced by intensive farming to only four populations in the entire United Kingdom.

On first arriving in Australia I was daunted by the sheer diversity and utter difference of the ecology found here. On early bushwalks I was made homesick by the sight of 'British' weeds like Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*) and Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*) - to a British

ecologist, indicators of species-rich grassland, but to an Australian ecologist, of something quite different! I have got used to calling them weeds, and hope that by working at ANPC I can help reverse some of the damage us colonists have wrought in Australian ecosystems! Although my childhood was spent living in Africa, the Middle East and North America, Australia has already announced itself to me as somewhere very special indeed, and I realise that many issues in plant conservation are similar the world over.

One of my roles at ANPC is to edit *Danthonia*. This is an exciting opportunity to continue the excellent work done so far to make this newsletter a key means for exchanging information on plant conservation in Australia. I would urge all members to treat this newsletter as their own forum for information exchange, and to continue contributing your reports, articles, forthcoming events and so on. It's so important that we learn from each other's experiences and not waste precious resources duplicating effort.

I look forward to meeting you over the next few months - please feel free to give me a ring or send me an e-mail if there's anything we can do for you in the National Office, or if you just want to say 'hello'.

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## Managing information for plant conservation: An approach from New Zealand

*John Sawyer, Department of Conservation, Wellington*

Accurate information about the status, location and management needs of plant species of conservation concern is a vital tool for achieving effective and coordinated conservation actions. The New Zealand Department of Conservation has developed and now maintains an indigenous plant database in Wellington Conservancy (one of New Zealand's 13 administrative regions). That database proved to be so useful that many other regions adopted the same system. It is now being used as the basis for a national plant database and could also be of use in implementing plant conservation strategies in other countries.

The first step in the approach was to prepare and publish a plant conservation strategy for Wellington Conservancy in 1996 (Empson & Sawyer 1996). That strategy identified the indigenous plant species of conservation concern and key tasks to be undertaken. The compilation of information about plants of conservation concern onto a central computer database held in Wellington was a principal part of the strategy.

Information on the database includes: species occurrence and abundance data (that can be viewed using a Geographic Information System); taxonomic information and *ex situ* details. A Microsoft Access database is used that is available to all staff in the region. That means all staff, especially those working in the field, can quickly access the information they need to carry out site-based work.

Information has been gathered for the database for the past five years from a variety of sources, including all New Zealand herbaria;



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many plant reports and publications (including past vegetation surveys); species recovery plans; the diaries of botanists; a collection of plant checklists; and record sheets completed by departmental staff and others (such as members of the Wellington Botanical Society).

Conservancy staff now work to ensure the database is accurate and up-to-date and enter new information as it arrives.

The database has many uses once the information has been entered. For example, the information has now been field checked and published as a guide and plant atlas (see Sawyer et al. 1998). The Department of Conservation has also prepared management plans for all populations of nationally threatened indigenous plant species, and their associated plant and animal communities (see Townsend et al. 1998). Those plans are implemented as part of annual work programmes. Additional population plans are prepared when new species populations are discovered.

Furthermore, the data has been used as an integral part of the regional plant conservation strategy to:

- Provide baseline information for comparative analysis of future changes in the distribution of the species
- Develop research projects that seek to provide ecological explanations for observed distribution patterns
- Determine the degree to which a species range coincides with Protected Natural Areas and so help prioritise efforts for legal protection of threatened species populations
- Identify sites to which threatened plant species introductions should be considered

Database information has also been used to prepare regional plans for conservation management of plant species of regional

importance (eg. management indicator species) but not regarded as nationally threatened. One example is a plan prepared for *Metrosideros robusta* (northern rata - used in various parts of the country as an indicator of forest condition) (McKessar and Sawyer 1999).

Please contact John Sawyer for more information about the plant conservation strategy, the plant field guide, the population management plans or the regional plant information database. John will also be talking about plant conservation in New Zealand at the ANPC Conference in Albury Wodonga in November, as well as demonstrating the database.

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### Further Reading

Empson, R. and Sawyer, J.W.D. 1996. Plant Conservation Strategy — Wellington Conservancy. Department of Conservation, Wellington.

McKessar, K. and Sawyer, J.W.D. 1999. Northern rata (*Metrosideros robusta*) in Wellington Conservancy: Current status and future management. Department of Conservation, Wellington

Sawyer, J.W.D., Townsend, A.J., Beadel, S.M., de Lange, P.J. and Shaw, W.B. 1998. Plants of National Conservation Concern in Wellington Conservancy. Department of Conservation, Wellington.

Spellerberg, I.F. & Sawyer, J.W.D. 1999. An introduction to Applied Biogeography. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Townsend, A.J., Sawyer, J.W.D., Beadel, S.M., de Lange, P.J. and Shaw, W.B. 1998. Plants of National Conservation Concern in Wellington Conservancy: Current status and future management. Unpublished report by the Department of Conservation, Wellington.

## Announcing a Day of Plant Conservation Techniques Practical Workshops

ANPC is running a day of practical workshops in plant conservation techniques as part of our national conference. Workshop topics will include helping to identify and map fungi, propagating rare and threatened plants, monitoring techniques, the Wollemi Pine as a case study of integrated plant conservation, plus posters, computer demos and bookstalls. Aimed at landholders, community groups and interested individuals, the workshops will be held from 9am to 5pm, Sunday 28th November at Lake Hume Resort, Albury Wodonga. The cost for the day is \$50, which includes lunch, plus morning and afternoon tea. Contact the National Office for more information.





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