



Successful conservation through citizen science

Laura is driven, like her hero Jane Goodall, to make a difference. She is passionate about all of Aotearoa New Zealand's biodiversity, even the little rare things that often get overlooked.

She sees kea, large adventurous parrots that are drawn to human contact, as a gateway species to draw people in and learn more about the wider ecosystem and our native biota.

Her work with the Kea Conservation Trust involves community engagement and education and has seen the replacement of many lead roofing nails around Arthurs Pass.

During 2016 Laura was one of the volunteer initiators of the Kea Sightings Database (keadatabase.nz). This award winning citizen science initiative allows people to record their kea sightings across the South Island, generating rich data to support ongoing conservation efforts.

The citizen scientists are contributing towards answering scientific questions, but also being hooked in to caring for kea, and in turn to caring about conservation of the wider ecosystem with its lesser known biodiversity.

Laura has learnt that communication is key to success. Helping people discover and understand is empowering, creating new advocates to support these declining birds.

Laura sometimes feels frustrated by the limitations that surround her and the huge hours of work with little visible difference, but she keeps going, knowing that every bit counts in conservation—the thought of losing another species hurts. Laura finds motivation through the wins, no matter how small, and she has hope.

Dr Laura Young

2004 BSc in Biological Sciences, University of Auckland

2006 MSc in Ecology, UC

2012 PhD in Ecology, UC

'Our World' on Sunday evenings was not to be missed when Laura was growing up. David Attenborough transported her to amazing landscapes and their species around the globe. She explored her own backyard with enthusiasm and wonder, and now inspires others to do the same.

Laura was attracted to UC by the work of Prof Dave Kelly. She could see a way to combine her passion for plants, animals and the South Island mountains. Dave supervised both her MSc and PhD.

Highlights of her time at UC include rediscovering a thought to be extinct weevil and many trips to Cass. Her passion for Cass led to taking a major role in developing the Cass management plan. She also notes the many lifelong friends she made and great opportunities.

Cass had such an impact that she named her daughter after this special place.

Laura is passionate about communicating and educating people around her science. She has had roles as a Community Engagement Coordinator alongside being a field researcher for the Kea Conservation Trust.

Her role of logistics specialist for the Department of Conservation is supporting the National Predator Control Programme. She oversees the planning and delivery of the kea research programme.

Her awards include the NZ Ecological Society "Ecology in Action" award for outstanding contributions to the application of ecological knowledge through communication and education.

Laura has a profound belief in the importance of science communication, evidence of this can be seen through her many interviews and articles, from the kids news to the BBC.

