

# Habitat ECan

A bi-monthly update on Environment Canterbury people, activities and opportunities.



Issue 17- January 2010

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## Canterbury waterways under spotlight

*Finding out whether fish in Canterbury rivers can easily swim upstream or downstream was just part of the brief for four university students working for Environment Canterbury this summer.*

The students made their way on foot and via 4WD to some of the most remote corners of the region collecting insect samples from streams and rivers for Environment Canterbury's ecosystem health monitoring programme. The use of 'fish passage' as an indicator of ecosystem health is a possible new tool for the regional council.

Water Quality Scientist Mary Beech, who oversees the programme, says the benefit of employing students is their availability during summer when waterways are easiest to assess.

"The students are a completely essential part of this programme. We wouldn't be able to cover as much of the region without them. They are a big asset to us."

Samples were collected from one hour north of Kaikoura to the north bank of the Waitaki River with more than 150 streams getting an annual check-up.

After Christmas the focus moved to the Courtney-Kaiapoi and Ashley-Waimakariri catchments to align with investigations in those areas into surface water quantity and quality.

"Our students undertook monthly gauging of river flows and water quality samples to see what chemicals were present." Collecting insect data was also part of the role.

"The goal is to get an idea of whether we are seeing losses or gains in surface water and how this ties in with water quality from the mountains to the sea. Looking at macro invertebrates helps tie this all together," says Mary.

A new feature for the future, trialled this year on a small scale, was the assessment of fish passage in the Courtney catchment near Kaiapoi

*"We're looking at how easy it is for fish to migrate, to get where they want to be, and for resident fish to re-colonise an area if they have been washed out of it. Basically we want to know how obstructions in stream impact on them."*

Mary says while the fish passage study is a pilot, she hopes over the next five years Environment Canterbury will put more resources into the area.

*"We need to look at the fish because ecosystems are multi element and they (the fish) are very much part of what is happening."*

With the students finishing work next month, Mary says the data will be analysed to give an up-to-date overview of the health of Canterbury's waterways.

This summer is the 11th year Environment Canterbury has employed students to help with its ecosystem health monitoring programme.

Water Quality Scientist Mary Beech says the jobs are highly sought after and provide an excellent addition for any CV.

*"The roles help us maintain our links with the universities and the students get really great experience on the job. The benefits for the students are fairly significant."*

"And how great is it to see Canterbury while you are working? These students go to places you would never go to otherwise, unless you were a super keen trapper or fisherman."

More than 50 students applied for the one vacancy advertised this summer, with the remaining three roles filled by returning students. Mary says it was "pretty tough" choosing a final candidate. Usually two or three roles become vacant each summer, and Mary encourages students to keep in contact with the regional council if they are interested in one of these positions.



Hayley Stoddart (left) and Kimberley Roberts collect samples for the monitoring programme.

## Website makes life easier for job seekers

*A newly-revamped Environment Canterbury website is making life easier for people seeking employment with the organisation.*

The website [www.ecan.govt.nz](http://www.ecan.govt.nz) was redesigned late last year with a new 'Work for Us' section bringing together all the information job seekers need.

HR Advisor Jo Spiewak says the new recruitment web pages feature easy to find information in visually appealing boxes.

Virtually all job applicants to Environment Canterbury now apply online so Jo says having a comprehensive 'Work for Us' web section means all enquiries can be addressed.

Environment Canterbury receives thousands of job applications a year and the website seeks to make it easier for prospective employees.

"If people put their name down when first expressing interest in a position, the website alerts you to other jobs in that area," says Jo.

Because of the specialist needs of Environment Canterbury, many new employees are immigrants who have recently arrived in



New Zealand so the website also includes information on 'Living in Canterbury'. Links to real estate agencies, local councils and what to see and do in Christchurch are featured, along with a 'What's On' guide.

The HR section monitors where people see the positions advertised and tries to incorporate current trends into its advertising.

As well as permanent and part time positions, the website also lists student positions that become available once a year. Although competition for the roles is fierce, says Jo, students who are keenly interested in working for the organisation should still apply, as the job market can change. "In the recent tight job market, we were employing graduates with a good education and relevant summer experience."

Jo says the key to finding out what's happening with Environment Canterbury is to check the website regularly. "There are all kinds of opportunities as soon as you are in the organisation. The job you apply for doesn't have to be the job that you are going to be doing for many years. There are opportunities to expand your experience and develop an exciting career path."

## Getting to grips with Groundwater



Three university students have been helping Environment Canterbury with groundwater investigations this summer. The students started in mid-November and will finish up next month after gathering information on hundreds of groundwater wells.

Groundwater Resources Manager Kathleen Crisley says Environment Canterbury is an "incredibly good place to get experience of this kind."

The typically Geology and Resource Management students are interviewed on their measurement skills and maturity before securing one of the sought-after placements "as they largely work outside un-assisted."

This summer one student undertook fieldwork in South Canterbury, while the other two worked in the Rakaia- Ashburton and Ashley-Waimakariri groundwater zones.

Kathleen says groundwater monitoring requires special skills. "They must be self starters and have a level of maturity with good attention to detail."

Students who work in the groundwater monitoring programme have a good chance of securing future work with Environment Canterbury.

"Certainly it's our intention to encourage them to apply for jobs if they come up," says Kathleen.

*One of the three university students, Sam (left) undertook groundwater monitoring around Timaru and Pareora.*



*Otago University student Claire worked in the Rakaia- Ashburton groundwater zone this summer.*

However as the section doesn't have high turnover, many students choose to seek employment in other areas of Environment Canterbury.

"Former students have been employed as consents officers with this kind of experience," she says.

Using university students for groundwater investigations works because "they tend to be available in summer which is a peak fieldwork season due to low flows. It gives us an opportunity to get extra hands out there working. It's also very cost effective for ratepayers."

Kathleen says the other benefit working with university students is creating a relationship to retain young people's interest in science.

"We need to be taking part in the training of the young ones coming through. Someone has got to as scientists in New Zealand are generally ageing."