



Environment Institute
of Australia and
New Zealand Inc.

INSECTS IN CRISIS SYMPOSIUM

Friday 4 July 2025 | Hotel Realm, Canberra



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ABSTRACT

What is the biggest threat facing the endemic insects of Aotearoa – New Zealand?

What is the biggest threat facing the endemic insects of Aotearoa – New Zealand? New Zealand separated from other land masses over 80 million years ago. Our wildlife evolved in isolation and in the absence of land mammals. They were not equipped to deal with the threats posed by invasive species (and that includes humans).

Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa arrived between 1200 and 1300 AD. They brought with them kauri (a species of dog) and kiore (rat) for their food and skins. And so began the impact on our biodiversity.

Māori culture deeply emphasises respect for the environment through the concept of kaitiakitanga or guardianship, a strong spiritual connection, a culture steeped on everything being interconnected, taonga or treasures.

In the late 18th century European settlers came to NZ, bringing with them many more mammals: pets, domesticated livestock and wild species for hunting. NZ was ripe for colonisation, converting native forest to pasture. And the decline of our native species continued.

But today in NZ we have Predator Free 2050, working towards an Aotearoa where our native species are thriving, safe from extinction. The eradication of five of our most damaging predators (rats, stoats, ferrets, weasels and Australian possums) is the goal of a collaboration between conservation groups, government departments, Māori and others. But are those predators the biggest threat facing our insects?

Or perhaps it is the five species of social wasps which have snuck into the country, and decimate our other insects?

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Jacqui Knight established the MBNZT (originally the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust, later Moths and Butterflies NZ Trust) in 2005 after learning that a key overwintering site in NZ of the monarch butterfly was under threat from a resort development. Working with the developer she advocated that the unique habitat of the monarch should not be affected by the earthworks and construction involved. The resort didn't eventuate, but the MBNZT was born.

Over the past twenty years the MBNZT progressed from strength to strength. The trust delivers conservation education through Lepidoptera, raising awareness amongst New Zealanders of the diversity of creatures beyond the monarch and the cabbage white. Sixty years ago, her father told her she couldn't go to university to become a vet because she was a girl, and "Girls got married and had children – which would be a waste of an education."

Jacqui's career path led her from secretary to marketing and publishing as well as organics and farming. She promotes the importance of Lepidoptera to the country's biodiversity, environment and economy, has curated live butterfly displays in museums, and inspires many to think about nature. She led a Kiwi Recovery Programme in the Bay of Islands community, initiated and ran several annual Environmental Expos, launched the 'Russell Lights' newspaper and established a charitable trust for community economic development. She set up a Habitat for Humanity project for a family who had lost their home in a fire. She is a mother, grandmother and WWOOF host.

Jacqui has been awarded a Member of the NZ Order of Merit for her services to Lepidoptera and community economic development.

Not bad for a girl who didn't make it to university!