

## CAWS Student Travel Award Report

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The CAWS Student Travel Award granted to me in 2015 paid for my travel my expenses to the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Ecology and Management of Alien Plant Invasions (EMAPi) which was held in Hawaii from the 20-24 September 2015. The venue of this conference was the famous Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort and Spa. Because this conference had such a specialised focus, mostly confining itself to plant invasions, it gathered together the top cream of plant invasion ecology experts and it was such a thrill and a great privilege to be in the presence of such greatness. About 250 delegates were in attendance and participated in very interesting talks and poster presentations. I presented a talk titled **“What makes one variety of cat’s claw creeper to be more invasive than the other?”** and my session was allocated under the Ecological studies-Reproduction theme. My presentation was on the first day of the Conference, which gave me the liberty to enjoy the rest of the program without any hassles. I planned out my travel such that I arrived in Hawaii a few days before the Conference started and so had ample time to prepare and relax. My talk went very well, attracting a lot of interest because I had 7 questions (one of my supervisors said that was legendary!). Even after the presentation, a number of people were keen to discuss further. It was so exciting and a great way to get feedback on my research. During the conference, I attended a lot of presentations, especially those that were related to my own research and I got a great deal of insight into how others analysed and reported similar data. It was really inspiring to learn about the great achievements/progress other students have made in their research projects. The poster sessions were very exciting too, and it was great engaging presenters who were so excited to answer questions. The 13<sup>th</sup> EMAPi conference used an interactive app called Whova which provided a platform for participants to continue interacting beyond the time allocated for the talks, and it was a great way to network too. Conference participants could upload their profiles and electronic business cards into that app and share with those who were interested in keeping in touch after the conference. This was quite novel in my view, and I did share and exchange contacts with a number of guests through this medium as well. The EMAPi conference really provided a great networking opportunity for me, providing potential future collaborators because almost everyone in attendance worked on similar research topics. I also took the opportunity to discuss potential post-doctoral positions with potential supervisors. Participants of the EMAPi conference were also given the opportunity to publish their findings presented at the EMAPi conference in a special issue of NeoBiota Journal, and I have already submitted the manuscript.

While in Hawaii I also decided to make the most of it by arranging to visit Prof Ostertag’s lab at the University of Hawaii in Hilo. Professor Ostertag was kind enough to agree that I visit her lab and she arranged with her lab group to take me (and one other PhD student) to her study sites in the field where she conducts restoration ecology experiments. She later took us on an excursion through one of the most amazing rainforest and water-falls I have ever seen. It was one of the highlights of my travel to this conference. This wonderful experience and opportunity would not have been possible without the support of the CAWS through the student travel award, and for that I remain eternally grateful. Mahalo!