Advancing the science of native species reintroduction

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New Zealand Saddlebacks were previously endangered but are now recovering. Credit: Duncan London

Although New Zealand has a long history of attempting to reintroduce native species into their former habitats, projects have been poorly

conceived, poorly monitored and had poor success say New Zealand's leading reintroduction biologists.

A newly-released book, *Advances in Reintroduction Biology of Australian and New Zealand Fauna*, outlines the progress in research aimed at improving reintroduction practice. It shows how sciences like population ecology and genetics can be used to predict the fates of reintroductions, and how experiments can be used to determine the management needed.

The project was led by Doug Armstrong, Oceania Chair of the Reintroduction Specialist Group and Professor of Conservation Biology at Massey University, but is a collaboration between 70 reintroduction biologists working on projects throughout Australia and New Zealand.

The authors say that focussing on general themes is more important than simply describing case studies, but use case studies of birds, mammals, reptiles, and fish throughout to illustrate the science.

Professor Armstrong says this book not only summarises past research, but also opens the door to discussion about future directions.

He says the 'hot-topics' include having a predator free New Zealand and the de-extinction movement.

"Serious consideration is now being given to resurrecting extinct species like the Huia. This creates exciting possibilities but also potential concerns. The ultimate goal is to return these species to the wild, so the de-extinction movement needs to be strongly guided by reintroduction science."

Read a NZ Herald Question and Answer interview with Professor Armstrong here.

He says reintroduction biology is a fairly new area of research. The Reintroduction Specialist Group was launched by the World Conservation Union in 1988 in response to unsuccessful reintroductions worldwide.

"New Zealand and Australian researchers have played a major role in advancing this field due to the huge number of reintroduction projects in our region. It only makes sense that the book focuses on reintroductions in these areas."

Provided by Massey University