

Clean and green but not a native to be seen?

The Canterbury Plains are one of the worst examples of the loss of native plants in New Zealand, says Lincoln University's Professor Ian Spellerberg. "Less than one per cent of native vegetation remains on our Plains."

Returning to Canterbury from overseas, Ian was disappointed at the lack of natives compared to English hedgerows, now some of the last bastions of wildlife habitat.

Ian wants to see native plants spreading across the Plains again and he says the Te Ara Kakariki Greenway Trust is one way to make it happen. (Kakariki means green in Maori and te ara means the pathway.)

The trust aims to encourage native plant communities for all reasons – restoration, boundaries, shelter belts, crops, tourism. Its long-term vision, maybe taking hundreds of years, is to make connections between the mountains and sea by using corridors and stepping stones of native plant communities. Another goal is a one-stop-shop for information. Encouragingly, Motukarara Conservation Nursery says they can't keep up with the demand for native plants.

The land between the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers gives the project an identity and anyone can be involved.

This year, in conjunction with Southern Woods Nursery, 25 Selwyn District schools will be invited to design and plant a native plant community for their school.

Ian is enthusiastic. "I have this dream of tourists coming to see Te Ara Kakariki, a Canterbury icon. Imagine native plant hedgerows on those long stretches of road. It's the loss of associated native wildlife too: maybe we could re-introduce the kakariki (native, endangered parrot) back to Canterbury.

"We underestimate the value of natives in an uncertain future. What's the environment going to be in ten years? What about land use and changes in weather? We have to think about what roles native plants will play then – after all, these plants evolved to live in dry, windy conditions."



Professor Ian Spellerberg and Diana, Lady Isaac at recent native plantings at Peacock Springs, north-west Christchurch. The Isaac Centre for Nature Conservation (ICNC) was established 11 years ago to build on and focus the skills and scholarship of Lincoln University staff for research, teaching and vocational training in nature conservation. ICNC sponsors the Annual State of the Nation's Environment address, facilitates an annual nature conservation think tank (Flock Hill workshops) and provides a free service to schools via Waterwatch.

i **Would you like to be involved in Te Ara Kakariki? email: Spelleri@lincoln.ac.nz**
For more information: www.lincoln.ac.nz/section645.html