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The impact of conservation translocations on vector-borne parasites

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Ecology at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand**

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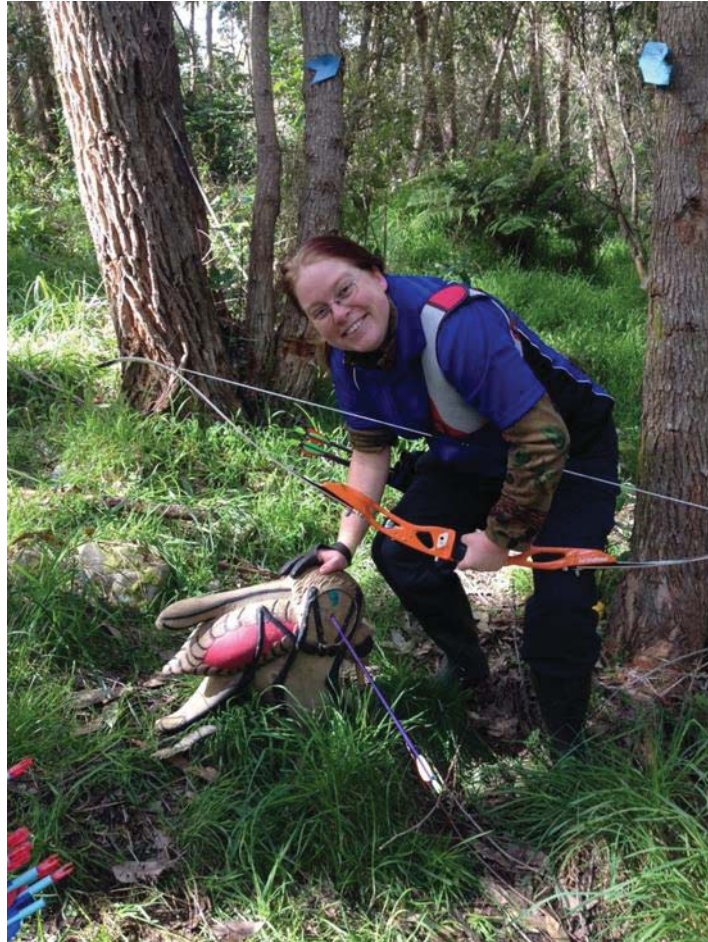
Abstract

Wildlife conservation in New Zealand relies on translocations of endangered species to safe sites. While knowledge of the biology and behaviour of translocated hosts has steadily increased, the role of parasites in wildlife translocations has been largely overlooked. Parasites can affect their host's survivorship during translocations by causing disease. However, failure to translocate or reintroduce a host specific parasite with its endangered host can contribute to the extinction of the parasite with unforeseen consequences for the future of the host or even the whole ecosystem. The main aims of this study were to establish baseline data on the impact of North Island saddleback translocations on their avian malaria (*Plasmodium* spp.) parasites as well as gaining further insight into potential vectors in New Zealand. The study was also intended to contribute to the development of recommendations for future parasite screening programmes for native passerine translocations. Saddlebacks and *Plasmodium* were chosen because of the detailed saddleback translocation history and its known relationship with the parasite.

As a result of this study, several *Plasmodium* lineages previously unrecorded in saddlebacks and New Zealand were identified, for example, the native Kokako01 and one lineage closest related to two lineages from the Americas. Nonetheless, the most frequent lineages found were the cosmopolitan *P. elongatum* GRW6 and LINN1, and *P. vaughani* SYAT05, common in birds introduced to New Zealand. This finding suggests that endemic parasites may have already become rare or extinct. In addition, *Plasmodium* DNA was detected in both native and introduced mosquitoes that may act as vectors. A qPCR assay was developed that was found to be a cost effective and rapid screening tool for the detection of *Plasmodium* in native birds suffering from acute infection, presenting with clinical symptoms, and in birds that were found dead. .

I conclude that future translocations should consider the movement of endemic parasites with their hosts. How this should happen is open for future studies. However, I urge managers to start considering this issue now as New Zealand has already recorded the extinction of one endemic parasite and many more may have already been lost without knowledge.

Acknowledgements



Having fun hunting mosquitoes in the New Zealand bush (picture by courtesy of Gillian Gordon)

Foremost, I have to thank my parents and family who enabled me to come to New Zealand and provided me with ongoing support. I am also very grateful to my wonderful supervisors, Isabel Castro, Laryssa Howe, Daniel Tompkins and Kevin Parker, for their patience and understanding. Without them I might have had many more difficulties and I owe them very much for their help in crossing the hard patches. They were always there when I needed them, to share new discoveries as well as tears, which has earned them my utmost respect and appreciation.

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Preface

This thesis is formatted in a series of distinct research manuscripts ready for publication. As a consequence, the individual chapters contain unavoidable repetition. This thesis is the original work of the author, unless otherwise stated in the references, methods and acknowledgements.

The field methods used in this study were the same as those used by Dr Isabel Castro and collaborators when studying the epidemiology of avian malaria in New Zealand passerines in 2007/2008.

The animal ethics protocol for this study was approved by the Animal Ethics Committee at Massey University, MUAEC Protocol 11/59. Birds from different offshore islands were sampled under the following Department of Conservation permits: NO-33680-FAU, TW-32756-FAU and ECBP-32634-RES. Birds were banded under institutional banding permit No. 2012/009.

This study would not have been possible without the generous funding by the Morris Animal Foundation, study grant ID number D13ZO-811: Do Translocations for Species Restoration Cause Pathogen Pollution?

I would like to advise the reader that this thesis started out as a study on wildlife translocations and their potential to cause pathogen pollution. During the work, and after receiving the first results, the emphasis shifted away from the potential impact of parasites on wildlife translocations towards the impact of wildlife translocations on native parasites, which can potentially cause extinction of rare parasites. This shift can be noted through the earlier chapters of this thesis, in particular as I carried out a review of the pathogen pollution literature and developed hypotheses and predictions that were directed towards explaining pathogen pollution. Please consider this when reading.

The raw data for this thesis can be found at the back of this document, in Appendix 6.

Table of contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Preface	v
List of figures.....	x
List of tables	xii
List of abbreviations.....	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Importance and aims of this study	1
1.2 Structure of this thesis.....	3
1.3 Bird species used in this study	5
1.3.1 Natural history of the North Island saddleback <i>Philesturnus rufusater</i>	5
1.3.2 New Zealand saddleback and avian malaria	6
1.3.3 Blackbirds (<i>Turdus merula</i>) in New Zealand	6
1.4 Study sites.....	11
1.4.1 Taranga (Hen Island).....	12
1.4.2 Cuvier (Repanga) Island.....	13
1.4.3 Tiritiri Matangi Island	13
1.4.4 Mokoia Island	14
1.4.5 Bushy Park	14
1.4.6 Maungatautari.....	15
1.4.7 Cape Sanctuary, Cape Kidnappers	15
Chapter 2: Avian malaria.....	18
2.1 Haemosporidian parasites and avian malaria	18
2.1.1 The order Haemosporidia: Traits and taxonomy.....	18
2.1.2 What is an avian malaria parasite?	21
2.1.4 Worldwide diversity and prevalence of haemosporidian parasites in passerine birds.....	22
2.1.5 Individual factors influencing prevalence and severity of infection in passerine birds.....	26
2.1.6 Life cycle	30
2.1.7 Avian malaria as a disease.....	32
2.1.8 Diagnosis of avian malaria	43
2.2 Avian malaria in New Zealand	51
2.2.1 Lineages identified	52
2.2.2 Prevalence	54
2.2.3 Pathogenicity.....	58
2.3 Avian malaria and climate change.....	58
2.4 Vectors	60

2.4.1. Transmission and vectors	60
2.4.2 Infection in the vector	63
2.4.3 Possible vectors in New Zealand	64
2.4.4 Diagnosis of infection in the vector.....	67
Chapter 3: Wildlife translocation and parasites- Pathogen pollution and loss of parasites	68
3.1 What are wildlife translocations?	68
3.2 Translocation as a globally important conservation method	69
3.3 Possible problems faced by wildlife translocations	71
3.3.1 Introduced predators	72
3.3.2 Habitat suitability and habitat requirements	72
3.3.3 Behaviour	73
3.3.4 Stress	73
3.3.5 Source population	75
3.3.6 Genetics.....	75
3.3.7 Other	75
3.4 Wildlife translocations in New Zealand	76
3.4.1 Translocation history of the North Island saddleback (<i>Philesturnus rufusater</i>)	77
3.5 Wildlife health and translocations	85
3.5.1 Pathogen pollution	86
3.5.2 General rules for pathogen pollution in animal movements	88
3.5.3 Do these rules apply to animal translocations?	90
3.5.4 Recommendations to minimise pathogen pollution risk during translocations	91
3.5.5 Loss of parasites	93
3.5.6 Outlook to the future	96
Chapter 4: A new real time PCR for the rapid diagnosis of the four most important lineages of avian malaria in New Zealand	98
4.1 Abstract.....	98
4.2 Introduction	99
4.3 Methods.....	101
4.3.1 Establishing positive controls	101
4.3.2 Amplification and cloning of cytochrome b	102
4.3.3 Assessment of primers for qPCR	103
4.3.4 Determination of qPCR Detection Limit	103
4.3.5 Application of clinical samples	104
4.4 Results.....	108
4.4.1 Amplification and cloning of cytochrome b	108
4.4.2 Assessment primers	108
4.4.3 Application to clinical samples	109

4.5 Discussion	117
Chapter 5: A bottleneck not just for the hosts: the impact of translocations of North Island saddleback on the diversity of their <i>Plasmodium</i> parasites	122
5.1 Abstract.....	123
5.2 Introduction	124
5.3 Material and methods	130
5.3.1 Capture and handling of the birds.....	130
5.3.2 Preparation of blood smears.....	132
5.3.3 DNA extraction	132
5.3.4 PCR and sequencing	132
5.3.5 Phylogenetics	132
5.3.5 Mixed infections	133
5.3.6 Statistical analysis.....	133
5.4 Results.....	133
5.4.1 Prevalence	138
5.4.2 Phylogenetic analysis.....	141
5.4.3 Mixed infections	142
5.4.4 Conversion of infection.....	142
5.5 Discussion	146
5.5.1 Lineage diversity, prevalence and mixed infections	146
5.5.2 Loss of parasites	152
5.5.3 Implications for wildlife health in New Zealand	153
Chapter 6: New insight into avian malaria vectors in New Zealand	157
6.1 Abstract.....	158
6.2 Introduction	159
6.3 Material and methods	163
6.3.1 Trapping of mosquitoes.....	164
6.3.2 DNA extraction	165
6.3.3 PCR and sequencing	165
6.3.4 Minimum infection rate.....	166
6.3.6 Statistical analysis.....	166
6.4 Results.....	169
6.4.1 Mosquito fauna	169
6.4.2 Potential avian malaria vectors	170
6.4.3 <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages.....	171
6.5 Discussion	175
6.5.1 Mosquito fauna	175
6.5.2 Avian malaria prevalence	178

6.5.3 Potential avian malaria vectors	179
6.5.4 <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages.....	181
6.5.5 Implications for wildlife health in New Zealand	183
6.6 Conclusion	184
7. General discussion	185
7.1 General conclusion	185
7.1.1 <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages in blood.....	185
7.1.2 <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages in potential vectors.....	188
7.1.3 Recommendations for future screening programmes for translocations of rare birds in New Zealand.....	189
7.2 Future Studies.....	192
7.2.1 Identification of <i>Plasmodium</i> diversity and mixed infections	193
7.2.2 Origin of avian <i>Plasmodium</i> in New Zealand.....	194
7.2.3 Vector studies.....	195
7.3 Outlook	196
Appendix 1: Avian malaria in New Zealand	197
Appendix 2: History of pathogen pollution.....	218
1. Pathogen pollution- Historic examples.....	218
1.1 Human	218
1.2 Domestic cattle and rinderpest.....	224
1.3 Other mammals.....	225
1.4 Birds.....	227
1.5 Fish and invertebrates	229
1.6 Plants.....	230
2. Current situation of pathogen pollution.....	231
2.1 Mammals and birds.....	233
2.2 Amphibians.....	234
3. Situation of pathogen pollution in New Zealand	236
Appendix 3: Serial dilutions and melt curves of qPCR for most common NZ <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages using primer pair HRMF and HaemR2	238
Appendix 4: Identifying <i>Plasmodium</i> species mixed infections in mosquito vectors by interpreting peak variation in electropherograms using Geneious version 6.1.7 software.....	246
Appendix 5: Capture and handling of the birds, including measurements taken.....	247
Appendix 6: Raw data	249
Combined bibliography.....	279

List of figures

With few exceptions, all the pictures in this thesis have been taken by the author, Ellen Schoener. Photographs from other sources have been acknowledged in the legends.

Having fun hunting mosquitoes in the New Zealand bush (picture by courtesy of Gillian Gordon)	iii
Colour plate 1: Study species, the North Island saddleback, <i>Philesturnus rufusater</i>	8
Colour Plate 2: Bird sampling (1).	9
Colour Plate 3: Bird sampling (2).	10
Figure 1.1: Map of the North Island of New Zealand showing the sampling sites used during this study.....	12
Colour plate 4: Field sampling sites	16
Colour Plate 5: Gross pathology.	37
Colour Plate 6: <i>Plasmodium</i> spp. tissue merogony	38
Colour Plate 7: Blood stages of <i>Plasmodium</i> spp.....	47
Colour Plate 8: Mosquitoes found in New Zealand	66
Figure 3.1: History of NI saddleback translocations	81
Figure 3.2.: Map of all NI saddleback translocation sites to date.....	82
Figure 4.1: Complete Cytochrome B gene aligned with the primers.....	106
Figure 4.2: <i>Plasmodium</i> spp. tissue merogony	110
Figure 4.3: Melt of all four tested <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages	111
Figure 4.4: Seven 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard and standard curve) for <i>P. relictum</i> GRW4 using primers HRMF and HaemR2	111
Figure 4.5: Seven 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard and standard curve for <i>P. relictum</i> GRW4	112
Figure 4.6: Assessing a “mixed” infection.....	112
Figure 4.7: qPCR melt protocol using primer pair Plas 56F and Plas rev rt	113
Figure 4.8: High resolution melt protocol using primer pair Plas 56F and Plas rev rt	113
Figure 4.9: Clinical application; diagnosing the lineage infecting three deceased birds	114
Figure 4.11: HRM using primer pair Plas 56F and PlasrevRTt of clinical samples.....	115
Figure 4.12: HRM assay flowchart	116
<i>Plasmodium (novyella) vaughani</i> (genetic lineage SYAT05) meront (a) and gametocyte (b) in a blood smear from a blackbird (<i>Turdus merula</i>)	122
Figure 5.1: North Island saddleback translocations.....	126

Figure 5.2: Map of the sampling sites visited during this study	130
Figure 5.3: Map of the North Island of New Zealand with sampling sites visited during this study ..	136
Figure 5.4a: <i>P. vaughani</i> meronts (arrow) showing only four merozoites (stained purple) and a residual body with a small vacuole; note immature erythrocyte (*)	137
Figure 5.4b: <i>P. rouxi</i> gametocyte with the typical large pigment granules (arrow)	137
Figure 5.4c: <i>P. relictum</i> gametocyte	137
Figure 5.4d: <i>P. elongatum</i> gametocyte (arrow) with the typical elongated slender shape	137
Figure 5.5a: Comparison of number of lineages and parasite.....	139
Figure 5.5b: Comparison number of years since translocation and parasite	139
Figure 5.5c: Comparison of number of lineages and prevalence.....	139
Figure 5.6: Phylogenetic analysis and comparison of 32 <i>Plasmodium</i> isolates	143
A CO ₂ baited light trap used in this study set up in the forest.....	157
Figure 6.1: Map of the sampling sites visited during this study	164
Figure 6.2: Percentage of total mosquito species caught (n=6) in correlation to individuals caught for each site.....	170
Figure 7.1: Map of the North Island of New Zealand with sampling sites visited during this study, comparing lineages found in both samples bird blood and mosquito pools	189
Figure A3.1: Five 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard starting at 0.1ng/μl and standard curve for <i>P. elongatum</i> GRW6.....	238
Figure A3.2: Melt curve of five 10-fold serial dilutions for <i>P. elongatum</i> GRW6	239
Figure A3.3: Five 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard starting at 0.1ng/μl and standard curve for <i>P. relictum</i> GRW4	240
Figure A3.4: Melt curve of five 10-fold serial dilutions for <i>P. relictum</i> GRW4	241
Figure A3.5: Five 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard starting at 0.1ng/μl and standard curve for LINN1.....	242
Figure A3.6: Melt curve of five 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard starting at 0.1ng/μl and standard curve for LINN1.....	243
Figure A3.7: Five 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard starting at 0.1ng/μl and standard curve for <i>P. vaughani</i> SYAT05.....	244
Figure A3.8: Melt curve of five 10-fold serial dilutions of a 1ng/μl standard starting at 0.1ng/μl and standard curve for <i>P. vaughani</i> SYAT05	245
Figure A4: Electropherogram	246

List of tables

Table 2.1: <i>Plasmodium</i> spp. lineages identified in New Zealand and their respective avian hosts (updated from Banda, 2012 and (Schoener <i>et al.</i> , 2014), excluding the present study).	25
Table 2.2: Prevalence of infection in <i>Plasmodium</i> positive introduced and endemic species reported during 2006-2013 in New Zealand.....	53
Table 2.3: Prevalence of infection in <i>Plasmodium</i> positive introduced and endemic species reported during 2006-2013 at different sites and dates in New Zealand.....	56
Table 2.3: List of established mosquito species in New Zealand, their origins and associated pathogens (modified after (Derraik, 2004)).....	65
Table 3.1.: Summary of the status of North Island saddleback <i>Philesturnus carunculatus rufusater</i> populations (after Hooson and Jamieson, 2003; updated with data from Kevin Parker, pers. comm.)	83
Table 4.1: Cytochrome b gene primers used in this study; in bold primers that were used for the final HRM protocols	105
Table 4.2: The four <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages examined in alignment showing the differences in the DNA sequences in a 127bp part of the cytochrome b gene flanked by the primers HRMF/HaemR2.....	107
Table 4.3: Expected melt temperature for the amplicons of each <i>Plasmodium</i> lineage used in this study for HRMF/HaemR2 using Oligocalc (Kibbe, 2007) (http://www.basic.northwestern.edu/biotools/oligocalc.html)	108
Table 4.4: Clinical application: using HRM to diagnose the lineage of <i>Plasmodium</i> infecting three deceased birds, a North Island brown kiwi and 2 yellow eyed penguins (YEP). No. = sample number; l, r, e, n= label of positive controls (l= LINN1, r= GRW4, e= GRW6, n= SYAT05);	114
Table 5.1: Examined blood smears	135
Table 5.2: Results from blood sampling trips to the saddleback translocation sites	144
Table 6.1: List of established mosquito species in New Zealand, their origins and associated pathogens (modified after (Derraik, 2004)).....	162
Table 6.2: Dipterans sampled during this study	168
Table 6.3: <i>Plasmodium</i> spp. found in collected mosquito pools (a= abdomen; t= thorax).....	172
Table 6.4: Minimum infection rate (MIR) for collected mosquitoes	173
Table 6.5: <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages found in collected mosquito pools (a=abdomen; t=thorax); there were multiple mixed infections with two or more lineages in one mosquito pool.....	173
Table 6.6: <i>Plasmodium</i> lineages found at sites (a=abdomen; t=thorax); there were multiple mixed infections with two or more lineages in one mosquito pool.....	174

Table A1.1: <i>Plasmodium</i> spp. lineages identified in New Zealand and their respective avian hosts (from Banda 2012).....	214
Table A1.2: Prevalence of infection in <i>Plasmodium</i> positive introduced and endemic species reported during 2006-2013 in New Zealand	216
Table A2.1 (Appendix): Historic examples for pathogen pollution and their impact.	220
Table A2.2 (Appendix): Recent examples of pathogen pollution posing a threat to economy and biodiversity.....	231
Table A6.1 (Appendix): Measurements of sampled birds	249
Table A6.2 (Appendix): PCR and sequencing results of sampled birds	255
Table A6.3 (Appendix): Blood smears results.....	266
Table A6.4 (Appendix): PCR and Sequencing in sampled mosquito pools.....	275

List of abbreviations

°C	Temperature in degrees centigrade
μl	Microlitres
μm	Micrometres
μM	Micromoles
BLAST	Basic local alignment search tool
bp	Base pairs
CDC	Center for Disease Control
cm	Centimetres
CNS	Central nervous system
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
C _q value	Quantification cycle value
C _t values	PCR crossing points
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
dNTP	2'-deoxynucleotide 5'-triphosphate
DoC	Department of Conservation
EDTA	Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
et al.	Et alia/and others
g	Grams
H&E	Haematoxylin and eosin stain
ha	Hectare
hr	Hour
HRM	High resolution melting
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural resources
IVABS	Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences (Massey University)
kDa	Kilodalton
mg	Milligrams
MgCl ₂	Magnesium chloride
MHC	Major histocompatibility complex
min	Minute
MIR	Minimum infection rate
ml	Millilitres
mm	Millimetres
mM	Millimoles
MUAEC	Massey University Animal Ethics Committee

MYA	Million years
n	Number
ng	Nanograms
NI	North Island (of New Zealand)
NZ	New Zealand
PBS	Phosphate buffered saline
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
qPCR	Quantitative PCR/real-time PCR
RNA	Ribonucleic acid
rRNA	Ribosomal ribonucleic acid
SDS	Sodium dodecyl sulphate
spp.	Plural of species
SSC	Species survival commission
T _m	Melting temperature