

## **J. K. Fox Award, Amateur and Citizens Scientists**

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Each year, the Entomological Society of New Zealand (Ent Soc NZ) awards a number of grants to society members and non-members, including students, independent researchers, community groups or individuals. One of the awards given by the society is the K.J. Fox Award. The purpose of this award is to assist amateur and non-funded members of the Ent Soc NZ to attend the society's annual conference.

The K.J. Fox memorial fund was established by The Entomological Society of NZ following K.J. Fox's death in 1985 and the first awards were made in 1988. Applications for the award are called for on an annual basis. The Society's committee evaluates applications for the award based on the applicant's financial situation and the potential benefits of attendance for both the individual and the society. The amount awarded can vary, with distance travelled to the conference as well as conference fees taken into account. Applicants must be current members of the society. Applications for the award usually close a few months before the annual conference, with successful applicants notified in advance, so recipients can plan their travel in a timely manner (<https://ento.org.nz/awards-and-grants/k-j-fox-awards/>).

In 2025, I was one of the recipients of the K.J. Fox Award, which enabled me to attend the 5th Combined Australian and New Zealand Entomological Societies Conference held in Canberra. This conference marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Australian Entomological Society, the 56th Annual Conference of the Australian Entomological Society and the 73rd Ent Soc NZ Conference. I am very

grateful to have been able to attend this conference, which allowed me at the same time to visit the Australian National Insect Collection (ANIC). Together with fellow dipterist and lead invertebrate curator Dr Julia Kasper, from the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Wellington) we were shown the new ANIC facilities (opened 14 August 2025) and the insect collection (Fig. 1) by Dr. Keith Bayless. True to my passion I was also able to view some Tachinidae specimens, which were exciting to see (Figs. 2 & 3).



**Figure 1:** Insect units at the Australian National Insect Collection, Canberra



**Figure 2:** Australian Tachinidae



**Figure 3:** *Trichopoda* specimen

The combined entomological conference was held from 1– 4 Dec. 2025 in the Marie Reay Teaching Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra. The conference had a high attendance (290 Registrations) (Fig. 4) with well over 100 presentations spread over 4 concurrent sessions and 25 posters.



**Figure 4:** Conference photo of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Australian Entomological Society, the 56th Annual Conference of the Australian Entomological Society and the 73rd Ent Soc NZ Conference

Presentations covered a wide range of topics, *e.g.* Invasive Species and Biosecurity, Ecosystem Services, Ecosystem Services, Insect-Plant Interactions and their effects on Biodiversity, Biosecurity and Bio-Agroecosystems, Insect-Plant Interactions and their effects on Biodiversity, Biosecurity and Bio-Agroecosystems, Insect-Plant Interactions and their effects on Biodiversity, Biosecurity and Bio-Agroecosystems, Pests and Beneficials, Dung, Death, and Decay – Carrion

Related Insects and Forensic Entomology, Ecology and Evolution, and Social Insects.

Of particular interest to me were of course presentations covering Diptera. Such as: “A Revision of the cryptic Australasian cluster flies (Diptera: Polleniidae)” by Liam Foley (PhD Student University of Wollongong ); “A Revision of New Zealand’s Small Headed Flies (Acroceridae)” by Shaun Thompson (PhD student Lincoln University and Invertebrate Collections Technician Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; “Population Dynamics of Glow-Worms in NZ and Tasmania” by Dr Julia Kasper (Invertebrate Curator Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) and “The taxonomy and phylogeny of the New Zealand Endemic Wasp Genus *Degithina* Cameron, 1901 (Hymenoptera: Ichneumonidae)” by Simon Crampton (Postgraduate student Lincoln University), just to name a few. The presentation by Dr Juanita Rodriguez (Senior Research Scientist ANIC-CSIRO) stuck out for me, because it is observations like her's that make me in awe of the world we live in and make entomology so interesting. Her presentation covered “The first known troglomorphic, eyeless spider-wasp (Hymenoptera: Pompilidae) from the Nullarbor Caves, Western Australia”. This pompilid wasp is eyeless and brachypterous (without wings) unlike any member of the family known globally. I presented “A Revision of the New Zealand tachinid subfamily Phasiinae and rediscovery of some lost New Zealand Diptera types”. The complete conference programme can be viewed at <https://consec.eventsair.com/australian-entomological-society-56th-annual-conference/conference-program>

As mentioned previously, my attendance at the conference was made possible thanks to contributions to my travel and conference cost by the K.J. Fox award of the Ent Soc NZ. ~~Little did I know~~ I knew little about the collector K.J. Fox when I described the species *Zorion tarakiniensis* Schnitzler, 2005 (Schnitzler & Wang 2005, see also Schnitzler 2001) (Fig. 5) on hand of cerambycid (long horn beetle) specimens which K.J. Fox had collected from the western slopes of Mt Taranaki, New Plymouth, NZ.

Nor did I know anything about K.J. Fox when I applied for the award. I assume that I am not alone here and many Ent Soc NZ members do not know who Kenneth John Fox (also known as Ken) was.



**Figure 5:** *Zorion guttigerum*. (image: commoncopper 2023, <https://www.inaturalist.nz/photos/333918835>, accessed 30 April 2026)

Ken was an amateur NZ entomologist who migrated from London, U.K. He became an active member of the Ent Soc NZ and an active, enthusiastic insect collector, primarily from around new Plymouth and Mt Taranaki. He also observed and recorded transoceanic insect migrations, often with a focus on moth migrations to New Zealand. Ken published his findings in several New Zealand journals (see attached bibliography). But what made Ken stand out from the majority of NZ entomologist was that he was self-taught, not trained as a professional entomologist. However, he studied

medicine and after marrying New Zealander Margret Bull, they moved to NZ and he worked as a general partitioner in Manaia, South Taranaki. He always maintained his passion in entomology and became NZ's Ent Soc first amateur vice-president. Had it not been for his untimely death in January 1986; he might have become the society's president (Dugdale 1987, Hornabrook 1986). I believe Ken was not only the first, but also the only amateur holding the position of vice-president of the NZ Ent Soc.

Also, Ken was a great promoter of amateur entomology. Ken bemoaned the lack of amateur entomologists in NZ compared to other countries and called on the Ent Soc NZ for better support and encouragement of junior and amateur entomologists (Dugdale 1987, Fox 1971). Ken also attributed the lack of amateur entomologists to the fact that there was so little material available to identify species, which he thought would discourage pursuing an interest in entomology (Fox 1971).

Since Ken's contribution was written, means of communication have vastly improved. I recall one plenary speaker presentation at the Canberra Conference by Associate Professor Tanya Latty covering the seemingly decline of Australian Christmas Beetles

(<https://consec.eventsair.com/australian-entomological-society-56th-annual-conference/conference-program>). In short, to address shortcomings of scientific knowledge about Christmas Beetle population trends, ecology and habitat needed the national citizen science project "Christmas Beetle Count", was launched, which invited the public to submit sightings of Christmas beetles to *iNaturalist* (see

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/christmas-beetle-count> and <https://invertebratesaustralia.org/christmas-beetles>). At the time I am writing this article 10,986 observers submitted 25,684 records of 40 species of Christmas beetles since the beginning in 2020

(<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/christmas-beetle-count> accessed 07 May 2026). Amongst other records, new sightings of species that had not been observed in decades were reported.

Perhaps citizens science is in part a new form of amateur science and the platform *iNaturalist* a new tool to assist science research. Translating this into the NZ entomology context, being an amateur entomologist doesn't need to entail physical collecting of insects. Contributions to recording species, for example, on *iNaturalist* by citizen scientists, can contribute to increase knowledge of seasonal cycles, species locations, population dynamics, etc. To date when exploring recordings under the term Arthropods (Phylum Arthropoda) within NZ at *iNaturalist*, there are 925,683 observations covering 6,890 species by 24,843 observers and 8,772 identifiers (a lot more than professional entomologists) ([https://www.inaturalist.nz/observations?place\\_id=6803&taxon\\_id=47120](https://www.inaturalist.nz/observations?place_id=6803&taxon_id=47120) accessed 07 May 2026).

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