



# THE INSIDE STORY

Issue 42, December 2020

## Distinguished Professor awarded Royal Society's oldest medal

The Royal Society Te Apārangi has presented its Hutton Medal to Distinguished Professor Neil Gemmell in recognition of his research in the conservation and management of endangered species, and his efforts to promote the understanding of animal ecology and evolution in the community.

The medal was presented to Professor Gemmell at a recent event in Christchurch held to celebrate the 2020 Research Honours Aotearoa winners.

Professor Gemmell says he was deeply humbled to be recognised by the Society with this award. He thanked those who supported his nomination, his family and friends for their unwavering support over his career to date, and the students, staff, collaborators, colleagues and mentors he has worked with in New Zealand and across the globe.

In receiving the award, Professor Gemmell also acknowledged the previous winners of the award.

*"Across our country, the collective efforts of many hundreds of researchers working in schools, universities, CRIs, iwi, government and regional bodies, has steadily increased our understanding of the flora, fauna and geology of one of the world's great treasures – Aotearoa New Zealand. I am proud to be part of that community and to have provided some new insight into our remarkable fauna."*

Professor Gemmell's research blends genomics with ecology, population, conservation and evolutionary biology to examine a range of interesting, and frequently fundamental questions in organisms ranging from invertebrates to mammals.

His team often works closely with Landcare Research, the Department of Conservation, NIWA, Cawthron and AgResearch to help develop new genomic tools and approaches to conservation and biodiversity.

The Hutton Medal is the Society's oldest medal, first awarded in 1911. It is awarded each year to a researcher who has



Photo: Royal Society Te Apārangi

significantly advanced the understanding of animal, plant or earth sciences.

Professor Gemmell holds one of seven Sesquicentennial Distinguished Chairs (Poutoko Taiea), and is the AgResearch Chair of Reproduction and Genomics at the University of Otago. He received the MJD White Medal for Excellence in Genetic Research from the Genetics Society of Australasia in 2018, a Fulbright Senior Fellowship for 2018-19, the New Zealand Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Award for Research Excellence in 2019, The Society of Reproductive Biology Founders Lecture and Medal in 2020, and was elected as a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London in 2017.

Visit the [Royal Society Te Apārangi](https://www.royalsociety.org.nz/) website to learn more about the 2020 Research Honours.

# Infinite possibilities of women in science

A special exhibition currently running at the Otago Museum is challenging the stereotypical image of what science is, and what a scientist looks like. *100 women, 100 words ... infinite possibilities* showcases the stories of one hundred Otago and Southland women and girls who are involved in science, technology, engineering or maths (STEM).

Eight amazing women from the Department of Anatomy, who are each passionate about the science they do, are part of the exhibition.

Dr Alana Alexander, Dr Rebecca Bird, Anna Clark, Ellie Stevens, Professor Lisa Matisoo-Smith, Associate Professor Louise Parr-Brownlie, Dr Kristina Smiley and Associate Professor Jo Stanton each share an insight into their love of science, how they came to be where they are today, the challenges they have faced, opportunities they have found, and the enjoyment they get from coming to work each day.

A mere 30% of the world's researchers are women. The *100 women, 100 words* exhibition aims to challenge outdated beliefs by showing that women, and girls, belong in STEM and can achieve any goal they set themselves. It also illustrates that scientists can be found anywhere and everywhere, not just in the lab, and that science is, in fact, all around us.

So, if you know a girl who is interested in science, technology, engineering or maths, why not take them along to see the exhibition ... it might just be the inspiration they need to follow their own dreams.

The Exhibition is in the Beautiful Science gallery at the Otago Museum, and will run until 28 February 2021. Admission is free. To learn more, visit the [Otago Museum](#) website.



Alana Alexander



Anna Clark



Ellie Stevens



Jo Stanton



Kristina Smiley



Lisa Matisoo-Smith



Louise Parr-Brownlie



Rebecca Bird

# Congratulations to all our 2020 graduands



It's been a very unusual year to say the least, but perhaps one of the most disappointing aspects has been the postponement of all University of Otago graduation ceremonies in 2020. We have missed seeing our graduands gather in the tearoom with family and friends before the parade, everyone smiling and full of excitement.

While all May and August events were postponed, planned graduation events for December graduation were allowed to continue, so it was an extra special gathering of Anatomy graduands, both undergraduate and postgraduate, who gathered on the steps outside the Lindo Ferguson Building on Wednesday 16 December.

Congratulations to all our graduands who graduated in abstentia in May, August and December. The University is planning to hold further "graduation opportunities" in 2021. If you choose to return to Dunedin next year to join in the celebrations, please remember to let us know, and come back and visit with us.

## Anatomy prizes awarded

Congratulations to undergraduate students Blair McInnarney, Tithi Gandhi and Angelica Clarke who were each awarded very special Anatomy prizes for their achievements in Anatomy papers throughout 2020. The prizes were awarded at a morning tea held in the department.

### 200-level Professor Gareth Jones Prize

For BSc Anatomy - Blair McInnarney

For BBiomedSc - Tithi Gandhi

### 300-level Elspeth Joan Gold Prize

For BSc Anatomy - Angelica Clarke



Tithi Gandhi



Angelica Clarke



Blair McInnarney



Asha Mamgain (left), and Annie Sohler (right) who accepted the award on behalf of Melandri Vlok

### Postgraduate Paper Prize

Submissions for the Postgraduate Paper Prize were of such high quality that the prize was awarded to two postgraduate students who each had a paper published as first author in prestigious science journals this year. The recipients and journal articles are:

#### PhD student Melandri Vlok

'Two Probable Cases of Infection with *Treponema pallidum* during the Neolithic Period in Northern Vietnam (ca. 2000-1500B.C.)', (2020) [Bioarchaeology International](#)

#### Masters student Asha Mamgain

'RFamide-related peptide neurons modulate reproductive function and stress responses', (2020) [Journal of Neuroscience](#)

# Awards and Celebrations

## BMS Research and Teaching Awards



From left to right: Dr Tim Hore, Professor John Reynolds, Dr Rebecca Kinaston, Professor Neil Gemmell, and Dr Alana Alexander.  
Absent: Dr Vivek Perumal

Congratulations to all our staff and postgraduate students whose achievements throughout 2020 were highlighted in the 'best of 2020' video package shown at the recent School of Biomedical Sciences (BMS) Research and Teaching Awards event.

Particular congratulations go to our winners on the night:

**Professor Neil Gemmell** - Best Research Paper of the Year by a BMS Researcher

**Professor John Reynolds** - Distinguished Academic Researcher

**Dr Tim Hore** - Emerging Researcher

**Dr Alana Alexander** - Kaupapa Māori Research

**Dr Vivek Perumal** - Distinguished Professional Practice Fellow/Teaching Fellow

**Dr Rebecca Kinaston** - Pasifika Research Award

## OUSA Supervisor of the Year



Dr Alana Alexander receives her award from Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) Professor Richard Blaikie

Dr Alana Alexander scooped two awards at the Otago University Student Association's (OUSA) end-of-year function. She was awarded the OUSA Division of Health Sciences Supervisor of the Year, and the OUSA New Supervisor of the Year.

Dr Alexander is a Research Fellow in Professor Neil Gemmell's lab. She has been supervising postgraduate students for only a couple of years, but in this time has made a huge impact and connection not only with her own students, but also those she comes in contact with in the research lab. She is formally supervising two Masters students and one PhD student. She is also, in her own words, an "aunty postdoc" to several more students.

One nomination described her as the most dedicated, kind and valuable supervisor. "She is the unseen brilliance to our lab

group, advocating for a well rounded education and ensuing ethics and cultural considerations are taught, but also allows students to achieve and theories on their own with a validating and guiding hand. She is an excellent role model, and has an incredible work ethic, always going far beyond expectation and the minimum. And my wholehearted favourite thing is that she is the kind of person who makes others around her better. Academically, personally and professionally. There isn't a single person who has been worse off for her influence and no one she has ever refused to help."

Dr Alexander also features in the *100 women, 100 words ... infinite possibilities* exhibition on at the Otago Museum.

## Student Supervisor of the Year

Congratulations to Dr Megan Wilson who was awarded Genetics Otago's Student Supervisor of the Year award for 2020.

Dr Wilson is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anatomy. This year she has supervised 15 Honours/PGDipSc students, five Masters and seven PhD students from the Genetics, Biomedical Sciences and Anatomy degree programmes.



# The Awards and Celebrations continue ...

## Gray's Anatomy gets an update

Associate Professor Stephanie Woodley recently attended a “virtual launch” to celebrate the publication of the 42nd edition of *Gray's Anatomy*. This revised edition has been updated by international leaders in their fields, and our very own Assoc Prof Woodley is one of them! She worked with a number of authors to oversee the revision of the pelvic girdle and lower limb section, and also contributed to revising the overview chapter within this section.

*Gray's Anatomy* has been in production since 1858, and is still regarded to be the definitive reference book for teaching anatomy.

The textbook is revised and published every four years. Assoc Prof Woodley was one of ten section editors from around the world selected to be involved in this latest edition.



## PhD thesis recognised as exceptional

Ms Melandri Vlok's PhD thesis has been formally recognised by the University's Division of Health Sciences as being of exceptional quality.

The University deems a thesis to be of exceptional quality when the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Division agrees with the unanimous recommendations of all three examiners that the thesis is among the top 10% of these examined, and is of exceptional quality for research content, originality, quality of expression, and accuracy of presentation.

Melandri's thesis is entitled “Implications of human interaction for health of past populations in Asia”.

Mel was supervised by Professor Hallie Buckley, and currently has an Assistant Research Fellow position with the Buckley research group. She will graduate with her doctorate this December.

## “Bake your Thesis” competition

And the winner is .... Nethmini Haththotuwa.

PhD student Nethmini Haththotuwa was awarded first place in the University of Otago Graduate Research Festival's *Bake your Thesis* competition for her “*Eating for beauty and cure*” cake. She also received the People's Choice award.

Nethmini's research looks at the effects of a novel protein, developed by the Dias research group, versus traditional proteins on the health of hair and skin. The cake shows healthy skin and long luscious hair on one side (as illustrated on the left-hand side), and unhealthy skin and hair on the right-hand side of the cake. Nethmini's research is supervised by Professor George Dias.

Run by the Graduate Research School, the *Bake your Thesis* competition invites graduate research students to present their research in the form for an edible baked item. Judging is based purely on the visual presentation, not taste!



# Thanksgiving Service



The department held its annual Thanksgiving Service in Christchurch on 2nd December, with around 250 family and friends attending. Medical students, from 2nd year through to 6th year, were joined by members of the department and the University in thanking the donors, and their families, for their altruistic gift to medical education and research.

A special booklet of remembrance containing tribute messages written by the families was printed for the occasion. They provided an insight into the lives of these generous people, their achievements in life, and their reasons for donating their body. The students conveyed their own words of thanks and appreciation. An especially moving part of the service was the candle lighting in memory and respect of the donors.

Next years' service will be held in Dunedin in 2021.

# Goodbye 2020, it's been ... interesting!

The Department celebrated the end of a, shall we say, challenging year with a picnic lunch and piñata competition. Staff were encouraged to create piñatas with a 2020-theme so they could take out all their stresses and frustrations from the year, and whallop the heck out of 2020! Although the Dunedin weather forced the picnic indoors, the clouds parted and the sun shone for the piñata smashing.

There were many different visual interpretations on 2020, including a few that closely resembled a certain out-going President!



# Merry Christmas

Merry Christmas to all our staff and students,  
and our wider Anatomy family.

We wish everyone a safe and relaxing  
holiday break. Bring on 2021!

