

WHERE CAN SCIENCE TAKE YOU?

ANCIENT DNA HUNTER

PROFILE: REAL-LIFE SCIENTIST

NAME: Associate Professor Nic Rawlence

ROLE: Ancient Ecology Lab Director / Ancient DNA and palaeontology lecturer at the University of Otago in Dunedin.

FROM: Nelson | Nayland College (Nelson)

STUDIES: Bachelor of Biomedical Science and Master of Science with Honours from Victoria University of Wellington.
PhD from the University of Adelaide.

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WHY SCIENCE?

When Nic was younger, he loved road trips around New Zealand, where he became curious about rocks, fossils and stories hidden in the land.

He visited museums, learned about ancient creatures and searched for fossils.

Now, Nic is a scientist who pieces together what the world looked like long ago. By studying ancient DNA, fossils and clues from people and nature, he helps us understand how the environment has changed.

His work supports kaitiakitanga—caring for the land—and helps protect special taonga species.

WHAT'S THE COOLEST PART OF THEIR JOB?

Nic loves discovering the lost pages of New Zealand's natural history—whether that's finding a brand-new fossil not seen for millions of years or uncovering secrets hidden inside the ancient bones of extinct animals. He's also passionate about sharing science with others, inspiring the next generation of scientists, and busting a few myths along the way.

FUN FACT!

Ancient DNA shows us that the small ancestors of the giant extinct 16-kilogram Haast's eagle only arrived in New Zealand about two million years ago and rapidly changed size to become a top predator.
That's incredibly fast evolution.



ABOVE: Excavating fossils dating from 14 - 19 million years ago at the Saint Bathans fossil deposit.



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