

# WHERE CAN SCIENCE TAKE YOU?




## ANCIENT DNA HUNTER

**NAME:** Associate Professor Nic Rawlence

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

**FROM:** Nelson and went to school at 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 did you choose SCIENCE?

"My fascination with science started when I was a kid and teenager on road trips around New Zealand. I learnt about geology, natural history and archaeology, and hunted for fossils along the way - with numerous visits to museums in between.

"Now, I reconstruct lost ecosystems by studying how living and extinct creatures, humans and climate change shaped the world before us. I use ancient DNA, palaeontology and archaeology to uncover the past. This information can then be used to inform evidence-based kaitiakitanga and conservation of taonga animals by mana whenua and the Department of Conservation."

### What's the COOLEST PART of your job?

"I really like discovering the lost pages of New Zealand's biological heritage. Whether it's a new type of fossil animal that has not been seen for tens of millions of years or unlocking the genetic secrets inside ancient bones.

"I'm also passionate about science communication and inspiring the next generation of scientists... and busting a few myths now and then!"



## EVOLUTION

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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