Project Highlight

Historic Ecology in Oceania

The islands of the Pacific were home to ecological niches and island-specific universes. These island ecologies underwent dramatic change with the arrival of the first humans. A second and more radical change occurred with the onset of European influence, when commercial interests had a profound impact on the local economies and the local environments.

On the atolls of Micronesia, and elsewhere in Oceania, European traders caused the establishment of large coconut groves, as well as plantations of other tropical produce such as cocoa, rubber and the like.

The published, but especially the archival literature of the colonial periods contains much pertinent and detailed information undiscovered by ecologists and overlooked in its significance by social historians.

This project systematically assesses the colonial archival and published literature compiling evidence of nineteenth century environmental change in the islands ecosystems.

Examples of case studies are the systematic hunting and extermination of bird populations for the fashion feather trade, imports of biological agents to control the number of flying foxes, and reports of rare birds.

Further information is available from:

Associate Professor Dr Dirk HR Spennemann, Johnstone Centre, School of Environmental and Information Sciences, Charles Sturt University, PO Box 789, Albury, NSW 2640, Australia. Tel. 02 6051 9947 E-mail dspennemann@csu.edu.au