

# Lexis gets green tinge

**A** DOMAIN which has recently made and continues to make a significant contribution to global English lexis is the environmental one.

We are urged almost daily to consider our "ecological footprint", our "carbon footprint", or our "green footprint". "Footprint" used in this way is an effective term in increasing awareness of the effect that human actions and style of living might have on the globe long after we have left it.

We leave a mark, however unconscious we might have been in doing so till recent years. It is easy to trace through lexicographical citations how the green movement has influenced society, and how values change. Dictionaries, especially those with historical illustrative citations, are storehouses of social and cultural data and the whole environment/conservation/ecology area is well represented in lexical databases.

Following the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the ecological devastation of the Vietnam War, the 1970s emerged as a soft and gentle period of environmental awareness.

Terms such as greenie, eco-farming, eco-friendly, eco-movement and tree-hugger were prominent in the green vocabulary.

In the 1980s and 90s a period which was characterised by fear and dread ensued. We were warned of Frankenfood, genetic manipulation, the greenhouse effect and superweeds, terms that had been kept in the lockers of science.

At the end of the 20th century, more aggression-centred terms like biopiracy, ecocide, ecofascism, ecoporn and ecoterrorism came to be used. David Kemp's then-comprehensive *Environment Dictionary* (now available in e-form) was first published in 1998 with 1700 entries. In 2007, Oxford University Press published the *Oxford Dictionary of Environment and Conser-*



Dianne Bardsley

## WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

vation, with 8500 entries, reflecting the burgeoning vocabulary associated with this area of 21st-century life.

In addition to thousands of common nouns associated with the environment, this 2007 dictionary contains the names of organisations that contribute to developing green policy, including EarthFirst! and Ecoglasnost.

It provides the meanings for less common senses of terms such as eccentricity (a measure of how much an ellipse or planetary orbit departs from a perfect circle, which has an eccentricity of zero), and it includes a host of terms associated with the prefix eco-

The less well-known of these includes ecocentric, ecocline, ecodoom pessimist, ecosophy, ecotage (ecological sabotage) and ecowarrior.

The selection of these "popular" terms for illustration should not deter the serious or science reader, for there is much to digest in this volume.

**T**HOUGH claims that our own small islands are "clean and green" have become somewhat clichéd, conservation movements and policies have nevertheless had an impact on New Zealand English lexis. It appears that New Zealand contributed the term "bait station" to global English in the 1960s.

More recent New Zealand-generated terms include bush corridor, conservation estate, eco-bach, insurance population, kawenta (covenant), landscape protection agreement, Life of the

Trees covenant, mainland island and paunch dump. We have Forest and Birders and an Ark in the Park. The Resource Management Act has generated terms to deal with compliance and policy.

The re-appearance of threatened species like the Canterbury knobbed weevil (discovered in 1877, thought to be extinct in 1922 and rediscovered in 2004), the Chatham Island taiko or magenta petrel (rediscovered in 1978) and the Castlepoint daisy, along with the discovery of an unknown genus, the ringanui, a stygofaunal amphipod (freshwater crustacean), contribute to the New Zealand English vocabulary.

But a considerable contribution actually comes from borrowings from te reo Maori in the environment domain. Mātāwaka tāiao, or MEK (Maori environmental knowledge) has an impact on the wide use of terms such as kaitiakitanga, mātaihai and rahui.

The lexicon also shows that a surprising number of synonyms exist for some species. Whalebird, scooper, blue-billy and parara have all been used for the broad-billed prion (*Pachyptila vittata vittata*).

Similarly, bush pigeon, kere-ru, kuku and kukupa, along with the facetious illegal tegel, have been used for the indigenous wood-pigeon. (Some multiple names for plants and birds have been inaccurate, but have found their way into common usage.)

Just as we maintain a cultural distance from other major sources of English, our unique environment and the efforts to conserve it will without doubt continue to contribute a distinctive quality to our variety of English.

■ Dianne Bardsley is the director of the New Zealand Dictionary Centre at Victoria University's school of linguistics and applied language studies.

■ Send your questions about language to [words@dompost.co.nz](mailto:words@dompost.co.nz)