



BRIGHT SPARKS

Cover Story: The Fulbright New Zealand Awards Ceremony 2024



Also in this issue: [New Publications](#) | [In the News](#) | [Grantee Experience](#) | [Alumni Spotlight](#) | [Around the Office](#)

THE TEAM



PAUL ALTOMARI
PROGRAMME MANAGER
scholarships3@fulbright.org.nz



TOM CRICK
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER
comms@fulbright.org.nz



MORGAN BACH
PROGRAMME MANAGER
scholarships1@fulbright.org.nz



REBECCA HAIG
ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR
engagement@fulbright.org.nz



PENELOPE BORLAND
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



LAUREN SUMMERSELL
PROGRAMME MANAGER
scholarships2@fulbright.org.nz



MARGOT FRASER-JONES
CORPORATE SERVICES MANAGER
margot@fulbright.org.nz



**PENELOPE
BORLAND**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to another issue of 'Bright Sparks'! It really is hard to believe we are already halfway through 2024. But the weeks have been flying by, especially of late as we prepared for and held another fabulous Fulbright NZ Awards Ceremony. Our awards ceremony is always a wonderful occasion, and this year's event was no exception. We have included a selection of photographs from the night in this issue. Stay tuned for stories and updates on our latest Fulbrighters as they embark on a life-changing journey.

Also in this issue, we catch up with Fulbright alumna Peri Sasnet, who ventured to New Zealand in 2012 as a Fulbright US Graduate grantee. Peri's Fulbright experience in New Zealand highlighted the importance of science communication, and

she now works in that field for the US National Park Service, at Glacier National Park in Montana. And we include a fascinating article on 2023 Fulbright NZ Graduate Award recipient Bonita Bigham. Bonita has recently departed for Hawai'i to research the impacts of laws and conventions on the retrieval and use of marine mammal resources for artistic purposes.

All that and much more, so read on and enjoy!

EDITOR'S NOTE

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of material in this newsletter, Fulbright New Zealand does not accept liability for any errors or omissions. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Fulbright New Zealand.

ISSN (print) 2463-3917, ISSN (digital) 2463-3925

STAY IN TOUCH



facebook.com/fulbrightnz



@fulbrightnewzealand



nz.linkedin.com/company/fulbright-new-zealand



@FulbrightNZ

PO Box 3465
Level 5, 26 The Terrace, Wellington
6140, New Zealand
Telephone +64 473 2065
Email info@fulbright.org.nz

www.fulbright.org.nz



CONTENTS

page 4	In Publication
page 5	In the News
page 6	Cover Story: The 2024 Fulbright NZ Awards Ceremony
page 14	Grantee Experience: Whale deaths spark new focus for Taranaki woman
page 18	Alumni Spotlight: Earthquakes, Podcasts and National Parks with Peri Sanset
page 20	Around the Office

LEFT: 2024 Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer's Residency recipient Dave Fane

NEW IN PRINT FROM FULBRIGHT ALUMNI

- International journal Geoforum has published an article co-authored by Fulbrighter **Aya Morris** titled Advancing equitable partnerships: frontline community visions for coastal resiliency knowledge co-production, social cohesion, and environmental justice. In 2022, Aya received a Fulbright NZ Science and Innovation Graduate Award and travelled to Columbia University in New York to research sustainable development and resilience in coastal communities. The article is based on that research. Well done, Aya! Here Aya is lectured (left) with her first equal co-author, Dr Bernadette Baird-Zars, formerly an outbound USA Fulbrighter to Syria.



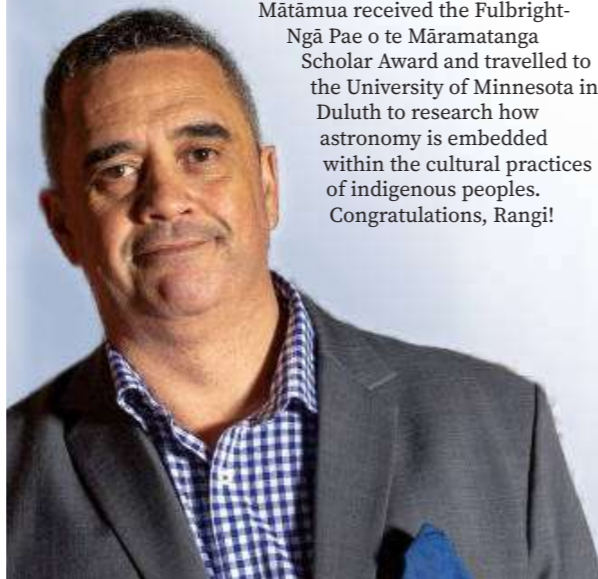
- Siautu Alefaio** has been appointed the University of Otago's first Pacific Professor of Psychology. Professor Alefaio is the recipient of a 2023 Fulbright NZ Scholar Award and, later this year, she will travel to the University of Hawai'i, and Brown University, Rhode Island, where she will research Pacific-Indigenous and urban diasporic resilience across disaster and humanitarian contexts. Congratulations, Siautu!



- New Zealand's first Professor of Diversity, and 2013 NZ Scholar Award recipient, **Edwina Pio** has been appointed Visiting Academic at the University of Oxford's Institute of Population Aging. Professor Pio's report Belonging as an ageing Asia is now available via The Selwyn Foundation website. Ka pai, Edwina!



- Fulbright NZ Board Member **Professor Rangi Mātāmua** on who received his Order of Merit for services to Māori astronomy in May. In 2014, Professor Mātāmua received the Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar Award and travelled to the University of Minnesota in Duluth to research how astronomy is embedded within the cultural practices of indigenous peoples. Congratulations, Rangi!



- Ailsa Lipscombe** has been appointed Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. In 2015 Ailsa received a Fulbright New Zealand General Graduate Award and travelled to the university of Chicago to complete her PhD in Music. Ailsa has also signed a contract with the University of Michigan Press for her first monograph. Congratulations, Ailsa!



- Professor Jacinta Ruru** has been appointed the inaugural deputy vice-chancellor Māori at the University of Otago. Back in 2011, Jacinta was awarded the Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Senior Scholar Award, to undertake research into indigenous challenges to Western property law at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, and the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University. Congratulations, Jacinta!





2024 FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND AWARD CEREMONY

On the evening of 26 June, we congratulated our newest grantees in style, at the 2024 Fulbright NZ Awards Ceremony. This event is the highlight of the Fulbright year and once again the occasion made for a wonderful celebration. Our thanks to The National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa for helping us put on a night to remember.

Grantees were joined by friends and whanau, along with Fulbright alumni and supporters, to acknowledge their fantastic achievement. Also present were Minister of Foreign Affairs and Honorary Fulbright NZ Chairperson Rt Hon. Winston Peters, and US Consul General and Fulbright NZ Board Member Sarah Nelson.

Thank you to everyone who came along and congratulations to all our 2024 Fulbright Grantees.



TOP: Fulbright NZ Science and Innovation Graduate Award recipients line up to receive their certificates. From left, Sainimere Boladuadua, Jackson Cate, Ryan Meachen, Felicity Powell, Michelle Meaclem, Sidney Wong, Alexander Young.

BOTTOM LEFT: 2024 Ian Axford Fellows Rachel Levinson-Waldman and Megan Seeds

BOTTOM MIDDLE: Fulbright NZ Graduate Award recipient Matthew Kereama (left) and Fulbright NZ Scholar Award recipient Jason Ingham.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Fulbright US Graduate Award recipients Panikaa Teeple and Kendrick Hardaway



TOP LEFT: Kaitautoko He Ao Takitaki Nate Rowe

TOP RIGHT: Fulbright NZ Science and Innovation Graduate Award recipient Sidney Wong

BOTTOM LEFT: Fulbright NZ Graduate Award recipients Michelle Meaclem and Felicity Powell

BOTTOM RIGHT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Fulbright NZ Honorary Chair Rt Hon. Winston Peters



HAVE YOU JOINED FULBRIGHTER?

Fulbrighter was launched in 2019 and is an exclusive online networking platform specifically designed for Fulbright alumni and grantees. It is a space where you can share your news and events, build relationships, or collaborate on projects. To register for Fulbrighter visit <https://fulbrighternetwork.com/signup>

Fulbrighter is also available as an app for iOS and Android.



2024 FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND AWARD GRANTEES

The Fulbright New Zealand award recipients who took up their awards in 2024 are:

Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Awards

Sainimere Boladuadua, Jackson Cate, Ryan Meachen, Felicity Powell, Michelle Meaclem, Sidney Wong, Alexander Young

Fulbright Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Graduate Award

Finley Ngarangi Johnson

Fulbright New Zealand General Graduate Awards

Luke Elborough, Wiliame Gucake, Amelia Kendall, Matthew Kereama, Meg Porteous, Pita Roycroft, Chelsea Wong

Fulbright US Graduate Awards

Monica Dix, Kendrick Hardaway, Gabrielle Langkilde, Patrick Monari, Melanie Schwimmer, Panikaa Teeple

Fulbright New Zealand Scholar Awards

Kathryn Hay, Jason Ingham, Mahsa McCauley, Mei Peng, Jesse Pirini, Ashley Shearar

Fulbright Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar Award

Hona Black

Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer's Residency

David Fane

Fulbright US Scholar Awards

Alexandra Adams, Sheila Crowell, Matthew Lachniet, Kira Omelchenko

Ian Axford (New Zealand) Fellowships in Public Policy

These awards are administered by Fulbright New Zealand on behalf of the Ian Axford (New Zealand) Fellowships Board.

Rachel Levinson-Waldman, Megan Seeds



TOP: Fulbright US Scholar Award recipients (from left) Matthew Lachniet, Kira Omelchenko and Sheila Crowell with Programme Manager Morgan Bach (middle right).

BOTTOM: 2024 Fulbright NZ Alumnus Speaker Pete McKenzie

TOP LEFT: US Consul General and Fulbright NZ Board Member Sarah Nelson

TOP MIDDLE: Fulbright NZ Programme Managers Paul Altomari and Morgan Bach

TOP RIGHT: Fulbright NZ Chairperson Alastair Bisley

BOTTOM LEFT: Fulbright NZ Scholar Award recipients Ashley Shearar (left) and Kathryn Hay

BOTTOM MIDDLE: Fulbright NZ Executive Director Penelope Borland

BOTTOM RIGHT: Fulbright Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Graduate Award recipient Finley Ngarangi Johnson (left) and Fulbright Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar Award recipient Hona Black.





WHALE DEATHS SPARK NEW FOCUS FOR TARANAKI WOMAN

This article originally appeared in the Taranaki Daily News and is reprinted here with permission.

When a pod of dead whales washed up on a South Taranaki beach near her home in 2018, Bonita Bigham didn't realise how much they would change her life.

Six years on, she has just left her home and family in Manaia, to embark on a year-long, US\$40,000 Fulbright scholarship in Hawaii.

Bigham (Ngāruahine, Te Atiawa), an artist and Taranaki Regional Councillor, was sitting in a meeting when news arrived of whales on the beach at Kaupokunui.

"I had no idea what that meant for us, no idea what help would come, what relationships we would build, and the opportunities it would provide for all of us."

Altogether, 12 sperm whales washed up on a 5km stretch of the rough South Taranaki coast in May, 2018.

Whale strandings on the Taranaki coast happen occasionally, but they're rare and nobody in her hapū, Ngati Tu, knew how to deal with them.

Help arrived from New Zealand's acknowledged expert on whale recovery, Hori Parata, and his team from Ngātiwai in Whangarei.

They led the hapū and iwi members, with Department of Conservation staff helping, through the gruelling, visceral process of harvesting the bones and parts of the whale that could be used, and burying the bodies.

Bigham said it was time she will never forget, and had inspired her art and study since then.

“These whales put my life in a whole different trajectory, they called me and keep doing so. They’re not a separate species [to us], they’re our relatives, they’re our family,” she said.

“That’s my passion, it keeps driving me forward, and it all started with the whales on the beach. Six years later, and two masters degrees later, here I am, off to Hawaii for a year.”

While there, she will work on her PhD, researching legislation and conventions which impinge on indigenous harvesting of marine mammal resources (including whale bone) for artistic purposes.

In the United States, it’s illegal for anyone to take a dead whale or dolphin, even to bury it, she said, including Kanaka Māoli (the Hawaiian equivalent of Tangata Māori).

“The Government doesn’t recognise their inherent indigenous rights.”

In 2015, native Hawaiian practitioners Roxanne Stewart and Kealoha Pisciotta were cited for an illegal “take” of the remains of a dead melon-headed whale that they removed off a beach and buried at sea.

“They were prosecuted by the American Government, the case went for three years, then the charges were dropped,” she said.

In contrast, in South Taranaki hapū and iwi were very well supported by DOC staff when the 2018 whale stranding occurred, she said.

Another area where the differences in how indigenous cultural practice is apparent is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species that is designed to prevent trade in endangered, threatened, or exploited species.

This meant Bigham had to leave her taonga carved from whalebone at home.

“Taonga make you feel safe, feel connected, share the artistry with others,” she said.

But because there’s no exemption in the law for indigenous practice, a whalebone taonga created in New Zealand would likely be confiscated at the border.

“We certainly agree with the intents and rightful application of the convention. No-one disagrees with the prohibition on elephant ivory for example, it’s the wider application... it’s the commercial overlay over cultural practice.”

After she arrives in Honolulu, she will plan how to spend the year and what she can offer the community there.

“The year is mine to design my programme as I want to.”

In June, she will represent New Zealand at the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture, and her paper knives (she works with paper) are in her luggage.

“I’m open to all and any experience, I’m looking to developing my art practice,” she said.

As well, she hopes to learn paddle-boarding and to spend some time on Hawaii’s famous beaches.

Her husband, Kevin Huxtable, had retired so he could accompany her.

“I’m excited because it’s a new adventure, all of our children are grown, there’s really nothing stopping us from going,” she said.

While she’s away, she will attend TRC meetings and her other governance roles with the help of technology.

Bigham said she was grateful for the support of sculptor Rangi Kipa, her Massey University arts supervisor Huhana Smith and Stephen Wainwright, Creative NZ chief executive, who were her referees in the rigorous application process for the scholarship, and the encouragement of her late mother, Hinewaito, and her son Te Rei, who she would miss terribly.

SHARE YOUR STORY – CONTRIBUTE TO BRIGHT SPARKS

We love hearing about what Fulbright alumni are up to. Help us to celebrate your achievements and milestones, your research and experiences, travel adventures, and more.

Send us your articles, blog posts, photo essays or anything you’d like shared with the Fulbright community. We email Bright Sparks to over 2500 Fulbright New Zealand alumni around the world, plus friends of Fulbright in various sectors across New Zealand.

Email your ideas to comms@fulbright.org.nz

Back in 2012, **Peri Sasnett's** Fulbright US Graduate Award brought her to the University of Canterbury, where in she completed a Masters in Geology. We caught up with Peri recently to find out what she's been up to since!

Hi Peri, thanks for taking the time to answer some questions for us. To begin, what was it that lead you to apply for a Fulbright award?

I had a wonderful experience studying abroad at Canterbury as a geology undergrad in the first semester of 2010, and I started looking for opportunities to come back. The Fulbright program caught my eye right away, and I started brainstorming projects with faculty before I left. However, the first of the Canterbury earthquakes struck just a few weeks before the application deadline. I quickly rewrote my project proposal to focus on the earthquake, which was a natural fit given my interests in studying and communicating about volcanoes, earthquakes, and other natural hazards.

What opportunities were available to you during your Fulbright experience?

So many! A few things that really enriched my time in NZ were: TAing a geology field course around the North and South Islands with the Frontiers Abroad program; flatting with a mixed group of Kiwis and international students, fellow geology students and other recent grads; learning to rock climb with the University of Canterbury Climbing Club; spending a month in Melbourne doing my lab work; getting to know other Fulbrighters at our gatherings in Wellington and visiting each other around the country; presenting at the Geological Society of NZ conference; staying at the University of Canterbury geology field stations around the South Island; and so much more!

What are your standout memories of your Fulbright experience? Do you often think back to that time?

My favorite memories are of exploring the landscape—both with new friends and visitors from home—and of the people I got to know while I was there. I loved getting to see so much of the country on tramping adventures, climbing weekends, geology field sessions, and long road trips on school breaks. There are so many awe-

inspiring places in New Zealand! I also look back so appreciatively on being included in Kiwi traditions by my friends there—one favorite was a Christmas barbeque, where we had chips and dip, whitebait, and grilled sausages, and played backyard cricket for hours.

I visited New Zealand again about five years ago, and I was so happy to reconnect with friends, colleagues, flatmates, and fellow Fulbrighters (both Americans and Kiwis) from my time there and find that we still had so much in common.

How has your life/work been impacted since your Fulbright experience?

My Fulbright was a pivotal experience that I'm so grateful to have had. In addition to conducting my scientific research, I got to watch my advisor, Mark Quigley, essentially act as the face of the Canterbury earthquakes. It underscored to me just how critical effective science communication is, particularly in moments of crisis. And I realized that as much as we need researchers who can make new discoveries and push our understanding forward, we equally need communicators who can tell those stories, helping the public understand and implement scientific knowledge in their own lives. I ended up pursuing that path, and I'm thankful for the experiences during my Fulbright that helped me understand its importance.

Can you tell us more about your work in the National Park Service?

My first job after finishing my Fulbright was at Grand Canyon National Park, as an interpretive geologist on the North Rim. Over the last ten years, I've worked 15 seasons in 5 parks, in many different jobs along the spectrum between science and education. I loved getting to live in and study such incredible places, including the Tetons, Yosemite, and Joshua Tree, but I've found my home as a science communicator at Glacier National Park. Over the past few years, I've worked on four seasons of the Headwaters podcast, which tells stories about history,



science, culture, and how Glacier is connected to everything else. Our team also designs the park's exhibits and print media, creates videos and photography, and manages social media.

Can you tell us more about the Headwaters podcast? How did it come about and what are you aiming to achieve with it?

Many people see national parks as beautiful places to visit and hike, camp, take photographs, etc.—essentially as an aesthetic and a recreational experience. But I also want national parks and public lands to be places for meaningful learning and discovery. There are so many stories connected to our national parks and public lands: about history, about science, about Indigenous stewardship, about our relationship with the natural world, and so much more. Some are difficult or challenging, but they all deserve to be told and heard.

Headwaters is an effort to dig into these stories and broaden the perception of what a national park's podcast can do. One season was a five-episode deep dive into the story of a keystone tree species facing extinction—whitebark pine—that was recently added to the Endangered Species List. More recently, I produced an episode that uncovered the role of the Buffalo Soldiers (African-American regiments in the US Army) on the first US government expeditions to what's now Glacier in the late 1800s. I got to interview Shelton Johnson—perhaps America's most famous park ranger, and a Buffalo Soldier historian and reenactor—about why their story had been forgotten, and what it can teach us today.

[Headwaters is available on any podcast platform, so be sure to check it out.]

How does your current work relate to your Fulbright experience? Are you still influenced by things you learned in New Zealand?

One of the things we put a lot of effort toward is respectfully working with local tribes to tell Indigenous stories on the podcast. I learned a lot during my time in New Zealand about living in a society shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and I appreciate being able to carry that perspective forward.

I'm also so grateful for the research experience from my Fulbright year. While I no longer specialize in geology, I've been able to focus those same research skills on topics as varied as climate change and glacier recession, the fur trade in 19th Century Montana, research and monitoring of black swift nests, and so much more.

Finally, what advice would you give to someone thinking about applying for a Fulbright award?

Do it! My Fulbright year was a pivotal and formative experience, and I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

TOP: Peri Sasnett; MIDDLE: Recording an episode of Headwaters; BOTTOM: Field work in Canterbury, 2012.

FULBRIGHT NZ TEAM UPDATES

Kia ora and welcome to **Rebecca Haig** our new Engagement and Outreach coordinator. Rebecca joined the team in June, just two weeks before our 2024 Awards Ceremony and did a great job supporting the delivery of a wonderful event.

Rebecca joins us from Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People where she was on secondment from the Ministry of Social Development. Of her early impressions of Fulbright, Rebecca had the following to say.

“The team at Fulbright gave me such a warm welcome, it feels like I’ve been here much longer. It’s been really special being part of our Grantees Fulbright Award experience and seeing these once in a lifetime opportunities come to fruition. And I love that there’s always coffee brewing in our office.”

Rebecca will be focused on our alumni relations, as well as broader opportunities to spread the Fulbright word through a variety of engagement and outreach activities. She will also be managing the Good Works seminar series, so keep an eye out for developments there!



Rebecca with one of her paintings on show at the Annual Group Exhibition, Vincents Art Gallery, Wellington.

WANT TO JOIN US?

EMAIL ENGAGEMENT@FULBRIGHT.ORG.NZ

We always welcome those in the neighbourhood to drop by for a morning cuppa and The Post quiz. Drop us an email at engagement@fulbright.org.nz if you plan on stopping by and we'll make sure there's enough coffee in the pot.

We are excited to be re-starting the Good Works programme in 2024. Fulbright Good Works is a series of monthly seminars that showcase the ongoing research and achievement of Fulbright NZ and US alumni.

We welcome seminars of any nature, such as lectures, Pecha Kucha, panel discussions, multimedia, storytelling, or performance. Seminars can be up to 60 minutes long and will be held virtually. To register your interest, please email engagement@fulbright.org.nz with a brief summary of what your presentation will be about and when you would ideally like to present. Please also include the year and title of your Fulbright award.



KNOW A FUTURE FULBRIGHTER?

Fulbright New Zealand offers a range of awards for New Zealand and United States citizens wanting to study, research, teach, or present their work in each other's country. We love for our alumni and contacts to share their experiences and spread the word about our programme to potential applicants.

AWARD TYPE

Fulbright New Zealand General Graduate Awards

Fulbright Science & Innovation Graduate Awards

Fulbright US Graduate Awards

Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Graduate Award

Fulbright NZ Scholar Awards

Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar Award

Fulbright Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers Residence Award

Fulbright Specialist Awards

Fulbright US Scholar Awards

APPLICATION DEADLINE

1 August annually

1 August annually

9 October annually

1 August annually

1 October annually

1 October annually

1 March annually

1 August & 1 April annually

16 September annually

Fulbright New Zealand is jointly funded by the governments of New Zealand and the United States of America. We gratefully acknowledge additional sponsorship and donations from generous supporters including organisations, philanthropists and individuals. To make a donation, please visit www.fulbright.org.nz/donate

