Research Statement

Cat on the Island
(HarperCollins Publishers)
Crew, Gary

Research Background

Cat on the Island is based on research into the extinction of the flightless Stephens Island wren (Traversia lyalli) about 1896. Lying in the Cook Straits between the North and South Island of New Zealand, Stephen's Island was discovered by Captain Cook. The wren was first sighted by Henry Travers in the early 1890's when its habitat was described as 'an avian paradise' in a letter to the New Zealand Colonial Secretary dated August, 1903. However as a result of the introduction of a single domestic cat by a light house keeper, the wren, being flightless, became extinct within two years of its discovery. *Traversia lyalli* has the rare distinction of being the only species ever known to be rendered extinct by a single animal (Flannery, T. & Schouten, P. 2001).

Research to produce this book was conducted through rare archival primary source documents (*Ibis*, *The Quarterly Journal of Ornithology*, Vol I, 1895, p 236-237), Natural Science Journals (*Notornis*, Vol 51, pp 193-200) and an authorial information gathering research visit to Stephens Island in 2007 under the auspices of the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland.

Research Contribution

The innovations undertaken by Crew in writing Cat on the Island are: (1) No single commercially published title exists documenting the extinction of this bird. (2) the fact that according to an authority as significant as Professor Tim Flannery that *Traversia lyalli* is the only species to be made extinct by a single animal (see citation above), the writing and publication of the book is considered innovative indeed. (3) The author has deliberately written this text in language accessible to youth, since young people stand to make the most difference to the fate of future endangered animals on this planet.

Research Significance

In 2004 Dr Gary Crew 2004 was awarded both the Wilderness Award for Children’s Writing: *The Extinction Trilogy*, Lothian, 2004) and The Royal Geographic Society: Whitley Award for his illustrated nonfiction works for a youth audience based on research into the extinction of indigenous Australian animals. *Cat on the Island* has been endorsed by the World Wildlife Fund. Dr Crew is four times winner of the Children’s Book Council of Australia Children’s Book of the Year Award - twice for his novels and twice for his illustrated books. Crew has also won the New South Wales Premier's Award for Children's Literature (the Patricia Wrightson Award), the Victorian Premier's Award for Children's
Literature (The Alan Marshall Award) and been short listed for both the Queensland Premier’s Award and the Western Australian Premier’s Awards. Crew has been twice short listed for the Crime Writers of America Edgar Alan Poe Mystery Fiction Award.