

Mozzie hunter climbs into his work

By STEVE RENDLE

It's a long way to come to study mosquitos, but Brazilian PhD student Jose Derraik is climbing into his work in Wellington.

To be fair, he's been in New Zealand for more than seven years and, with more than five years in Dunedin behind him, he's pretty much a Kiwi now.

Dunedin's a bit cold for mosquitos, but Mr Derraik is part of a Wellington School of Medicine and Health Sciences department looking at the possible effects of global warming on mozzie breeding patterns.

He's interested in finding out how mosquitos in New Zealand use native vegetation and he's regularly scaling the heights of trees in Otari-Wilton's Bush and Wellington Zoo.

An enthusiastic rock-climber, his skills come in very handy when checking rainwater collected in tree holes and another potential egg-laying site at the base of leaves of a plant which grows high in trees.

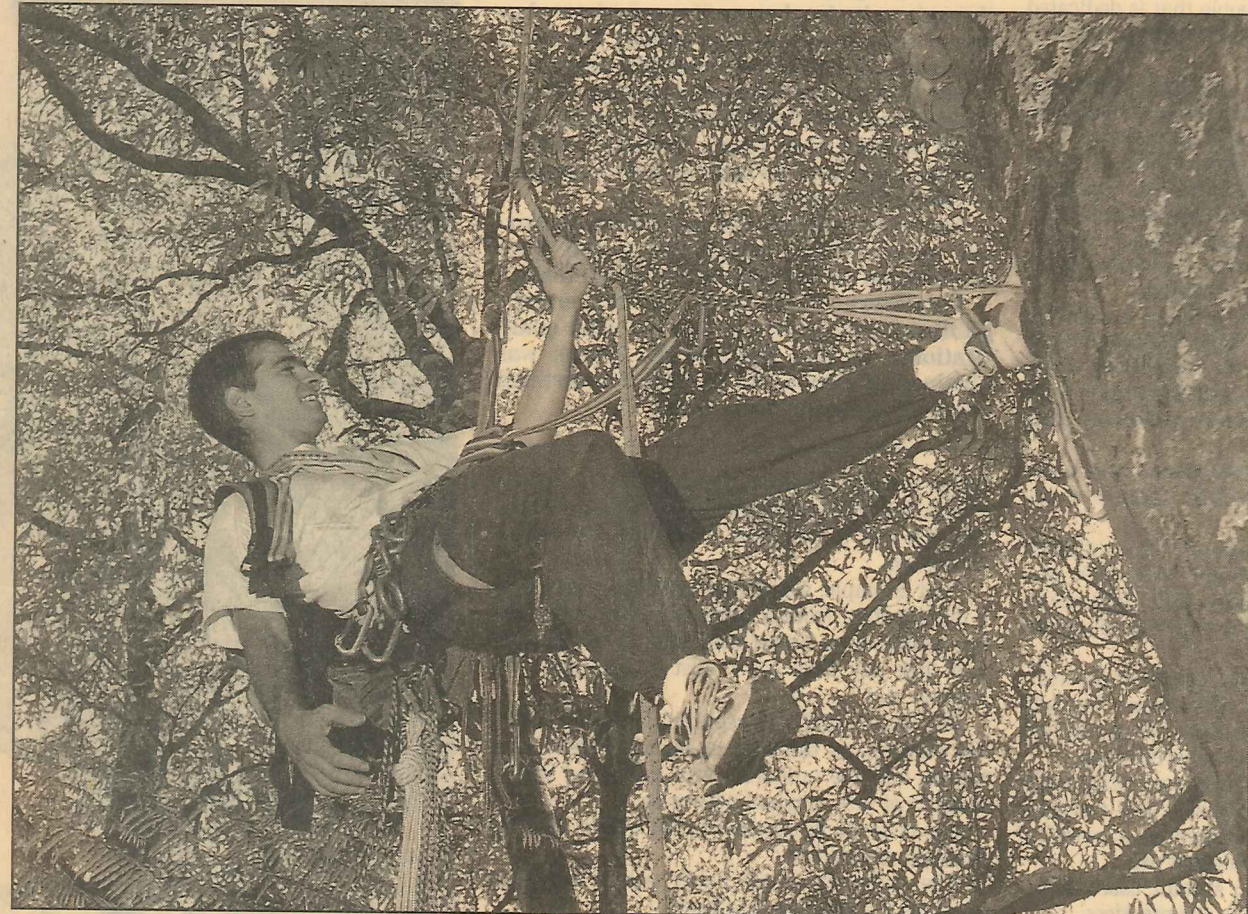
New Zealand has about a dozen native mosquitos but it's four exotic species which have become established, particularly in the north of the country, that are of most concern when it comes to spreading disease.

Mr Derraik is originally from Rio de Janeiro, where 100,000 cases of dengue fever last summer was a worldwide record outbreak.

Despite being away from his homeland, there are certain benefits to research in New Zealand.

"New Zealand's a very safe place to be in the bush," he said.

"If you went into any patch of bush where I come from there would be a



ON THE HUNT – Brazilian-born PhD student Jose Derraik scales a rimu in Otari-Wilton's Bush in search of evidence of mosquitos breeding.

Picture: PHIL REID

bunch of poisonous spiders, snakes, wasps and bees."

But he has applied for a scholarship to spend two months next year in Brazil studying mozzies.

"I'd like to do some comparative research . . . Obviously, mosquito research is much more advanced in places like Brazil where they have a

major problem," Mr Derraik said.

He's perfectly at home dangling metres up trees, after developing a passion for climbing in his hometown which he says provides the best urban rock-climbing in the world.

"I love heights," he said. "As long as I'm attached to something, and I feel safe, I'm fine.

"You could attach me to a helicopter and dangle me in the air."

The wind, however, can be a problem. "I was up one tree for about two hours and it was very windy. I ended up with motion sickness and felt really, really sick," he said.

Mr Derraik hopes to complete his research in three years.