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Whale of a Tale Nominated



Don't try this at home. Ingrid Visser gets up close and personal.
Picture/Michael Cunningham

By Brigid Lynch

Orca-mad Tutukaka scientist Ingrid Visser is grinning ear-to-ear after learning her book *Swimming With Orca* made the shortlist for this year's Montana New Zealand Book Awards. Fresh from eco-tourism duties in Antarctica, Argentina and Papua New Guinea, the former Whangarei Girls' High School student is even bubblier than usual - she didn't even know the book had been entered. "I was very surprised - and of course delighted."

The book, written last year and published by Penguin Books in November, is Dr Visser's third. Kids' books *The Orca* and *I Love Killer Whales* were written in 2001. There are fewer than 200 orca in New Zealand's waters, and educating people about the creatures is Dr Visser's goal. She is still figuring out the basics - how they breed, feed, and how their social structure works. "You think you've got a handle on it, then something surprising comes along ... They even have a Kiwi accent, just like us."

The other finalists in the Environment category are *New Zealand Birds in Focus: A Photographer's Journey* by Geoff Moon; and *Pohutukawa and Rata: New Zealand's Iron-hearted Trees* by Philip Simpson.

Queen's Birthday weekend is traditionally a good time to spot orca, and Dr Visser urges people to phone her as soon as they see the mammals: 0800 SEE ORCA (0800 733 6722).