

Conference Report - Australasian Ornithological Conference 2017

By Hendrik Schultz

The 2017 Australasian Ornithological Conference was held at Deakin University in Geelong, Australia. I was very lucky to receive a travel grant from Birds New Zealand enabling me to participate in this exciting conference across the Tasman Sea. The conference attracted researchers and bird enthusiasts alike mostly from Australia, but also various overseas locations. Importantly, a small group of New Zealand based ornithologists grudging no pains to migrate across the ditch and represent Birds NZ and avian research based in New Zealand.

The conference talks were an exciting mix of research with current topics from various fields in avian biology. It was interesting to see how state of the art bioacoustic monitoring techniques can be used as conservation tools. I find it an intriguing field, certainly challenging due to the vast amount of data involved, but also rewarding as new analyses enable us to study animal behaviour and assess biodiversity from remotely collected bioacoustic data. For me, among the most exciting groups of talks were those held by the 'kaki team' with speakers from Canterbury and Otago Universities. It was inspiring to see how molecular techniques can be applied to improve conservation of endangered species, such as kaki, that are on the brink of extinction – keep up the good work team kaki!

There was a good amount of seabird research presented at AOC and I was honoured to be given a talking slot within the seabird symposium, which was a very interesting mix of seabird research from Australia and New Zealand. The symposium covered current topics in seabird conservation such as the impacts of plastic ingestion and pest species on seabird populations.

The conference featured five plenary talks one of which was held by Tammy Steeves from Canterbury University. Tammy gave a great talk about 'Conservation genomics of threatened austral birds'. I was delighted to hear her advocating the importance of kindness in science – I totally agree with you Tammy, it is not all in the elbows these days! I think kindness and collegiality should always be on the very top of the list. Apart from symposia and talks there was a lot offered at AOC including a writing workshop, a photo competition and not forgetting the delicious snacks during numerous coffee breaks. These breaks were an excellent opportunity to meet and talk to other conference attendees. It was so nice to personally meet Lisa O'Neill and Nicholas Carlile from the Australasian Seabird Group during our annual meeting at AOC – thank you for the lovely chat during the conference dinner – I hope we will be able to catch up more in the future!

In the end of the conference, various field-trips were offered including a boat trip exploring parts of Port Phillip Bay with chances of seeing gannets and dolphins. I decided to spend a day in Melbourne to explore the city – I had great vegetarian sushi and treated myself to a copy of the new Australasian Bird Guide before heading back to Auckland. Thank you so much for all your support Birds New Zealand – I look forward to our next get-together!

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kāki - my favourite birds at AOC

