



## Australasian Ornithological Conference 2017

by Natalie Forsdick

The 2017 Australasian Ornithological Conference was held in Geelong, Australia, and was three jam-packed days of bird research. The New Zealand contingent was small but strong, standing out among the crowd of around 270 attendees, including volunteers, students, and researchers. The conference was hosted by Deakin University, and ran like a well-oiled machine.

With two concurrent sessions, 120 talks were spread over the three days, spanning a range of topics including bird habitat, behaviour, ecology, evolution, and a strong conservation focus throughout. As a New Zealand researcher, it was fascinating to hear about management challenges specific to Australia, such as the management of bush fires. The plenary talks from research leaders set up key themes for each day, including conservation management, the use of genetic tools for conservation, and impacts of cats on birds in Australia (severe being an understatement!). Speakers were kept to time with bird song, and when their time was up, they were laughed off the stage by a kookaburra. Keeping to time is always hard, but especially so for those presenting five minute speed talks!

In addition to talks, there were more than twenty research posters on display, and plenty of opportunities to talk with those researchers. Some amazing talent was showcased in the photo competition with separate student and non-student categories. With around ten prizes awarded to student presenters, AOC made for a great supportive environment for emerging researchers.

Along with the celebration of research, we also enjoyed making new connections and re-establishing networks thanks to the excellent social events. The ornithological trivia quiz on the first evening made for a great icebreaker, followed by the conference dinner held on the second evening at the Geelong Cats stadium. This was a real chance for everyone to let their hair down, as the meal was accompanied by a bush band who were very good at encouraging people onto the dance floor (including our own David Lawrie!).

I'm very grateful to Birds NZ for giving me the opportunity to attend and present my research (my current project is using genetic and genomic tools to improve conservation management outcomes for kakī/black stilts). For a first visit to Australia, it left a very positive impression, and I'll look forward to the next conference. For photos from the event, please visit <http://aoconference.wordpress.com> (see if you can spot Orbell!).