NZMSS First Overseas Conference Travel Fund

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22nd Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals: October 22–27th, 2017

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

I sincerely thank the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society for supporting my travel to Canada for my first overseas conference. The conference theme was “*2017: A Marine Mammal Odyssey, Eh:* reflecting on the journey that marine mammals and the people who study them have taken over the years.” Over 1500 scientists, managers, students, and other delegates attended, representing over 65 different countries. Conference presentations spanned all aspects of marine mammal biology, including behavioural ecology, acoustics and communication, habitat distribution, and population biology.

My oral presentation, *An observed decline in the mark rate of Hector’s dolphins at Banks Peninsula,* was slotted into a session on population biology alongside other talks using capture-recapture models. I received helpful ideas for future research and had a few people approach me to discuss using my methods for estimating mark rate in their own study populations.

Most of the poster and presentation sessions I attended focused on conservation and population biology. I enjoyed learning about the use of individual-based models to study human impacts, and the number and variety of other projects using capture-recapture models astounded me. The conference had excellent plenary talks; my favourites were on increasing human diversity in the marine mammal research space (by Asha deVos), the evolution of culture in cetaceans (Hal Whitehead), and “lessons learned” in detecting population decline of marine mammals (Scott Kraus). Another highlight was attending a full-day workshop on how to code Bayesian capture-recapture models. I will definitely use the skills I learned during my PhD!

This was the largest conference I have ever attended, and seeing the magnitude and diversity of work on marine mammals has helped me place my master’s thesis “in the big picture.” Having done my undergraduate studies in the United States, I was excited to reconnect with old mentors and fellow students I hadn’t seen in years. Again, a huge thank you to the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society – I definitely left my first overseas conference feeling more connected and part of an even larger “family” of marine mammal researchers.