

Review of attendance at 17th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals
Cape Town, South Africa 29th November – 3rd December 2007
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My attendance at the Society for Marine Mammalogy's biennial conference was a very valuable experience and I am grateful to the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society for providing financial support. This conference was notable as it was the first time it had been held in the southern hemisphere and was attended by delegates from more countries than ever before. New Zealand was well represented, with delegates from Auckland, Massey and Otago Universities and the Department of Conservation.

I was daunted by the prospect of giving my talk in such a large auditorium in front of an audience of internationally recognized scientists. However, I enjoyed the experience and was very glad that I was selected for an oral presentation. I received many positive comments afterwards and was approached by several delegates who were interested to hear more about my research. I would recommend to all PhD students to try and present at a major international conference.

A highlight of the conference for me was the excellent range of plenary presentations at the start of each day. Although they were on a variety of topics, there was a common theme which all the speakers embraced. They felt that with so many marine mammal populations under threat, the time had come for researchers to look beyond their science as an "ivory tower" and become more involved in conservation management. In many situations, governments and managers have failed to make the difficult decisions required to protect threatened species and so it is up to those who really care about the animals (very often the scientists who are studying them) to be more proactive. I believe that this is a sentiment we can relate to in New Zealand and found the presentations and discussions very empowering.

Apart from the studies on Hector's dolphins presented by the NZ contingent, there were only two other presentations on *Cephalorhynchus* dolphins. Although this was a little disappointing it was still a good opportunity to meet up with other researchers working on similar species. Of particular interest to me was the work presented by Dr Sonja Heinrich on habitat selection by Chilean dolphins. A variety of other presentations were directly relevant to my PhD research, and it was very valuable to be able to discuss with researchers who have encountered and overcome similar challenges to those I am facing.

Another very rewarding experience was the student affairs workshop. A number of internationally recognised experts chaired informal discussions on a variety of topics, enabling students to pose questions and receive immediate feedback. The process was not only valuable in terms of gathering information, but also as a catalyst for promoting cooperation and establishing links with well known scientists.

Again, I would like to thank the NZ Marine Sciences Society for their financial assistance and reiterate the value of the First Overseas Conference Travel Fund.