

AOC 2022:

Cultural divergence in an endangered passerine on the Galapagos Islands

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Yes, you are reading it right “culture in a bird”. For those who didn’t know, animals have culture too. And it sounds strange to hear the word culture and animals because people tend to associate culture as a specific trait of humans. When we think in culture the first things that come to our minds are art, music, traditions, and language. Although animals won't be able to create pieces of art, they have specific learned behaviours that are passed through generations this is denominated culture. In birds one of the most studied cultural traits are vocalizations, the slight changes in vocalizations between populations could originate dialects and that is considered a cultural change or cultural divergence. For a moment piensa que repentinamente cambio de idioma (aha! You probably noted something odd in my last sentence) Not all of you are going to understand it without the help of google translator. That occurs with some species of birds when they develop cultural divergence. I studied the cultural divergence between two isolated populations of an endangered Floreana mockingbird in the Galapagos Islands. With the arrival of human colonization to the Galapagos, this species become extinct in the island where they used to live but two small populations on inaccessible islets survived the siege of invasive mammals (same old history as New Zealand).



Currently, with all the advances of conservation biology, there are plans to reintroduce the species to the original range, but these populations have been separated for more than 150 years, so what happens if they cannot understand between them? That was the question I tried to respond to in my research and the topic I presented on the AOC 2022 thanks to the student grant awarded to me by Birds New Zealand. Unfortunately, due to some previously acquired commitments on the remote Chatham Islands, I was unable to attend the streaming of the conference. But now with some internet access on the main island (is the first time the islands have phone coverage and by then mobile internet) I've been able to watch some of the videos recorded of the presentations. Despite online conferences generally lack that camaraderie, mingling and networking of face-to-face conferences, I been able to re-watch the presentations at my own speed has been amazing. More important, thanks to the online mode I was able to present otherwise I would miss it.

Coming back to my research, in case you missed the presentation, I did find differentiation in the vocalization of this endangered species, these same traits have been observed in other endangered species such as the well-known Kokako. In the case of the Floreana mockingbird, my findings open the door for more research in the behavioural ecology and management of the species. Although I would have loved present in front of everyone, I guess now I will need to wait until the next AOC to probe my speech skills. Hopefully will see you there.