

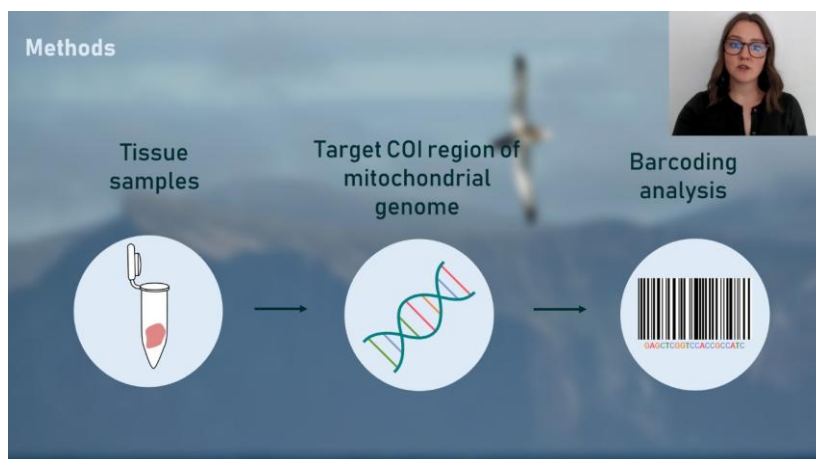
Australasian Ornithological Conference 2022 – Imogen Foote

Last year, I was very excited to head along to my first Australasian Ornithological Conference, which was to be held in Auckland in February 2022. I couldn't wait to hear about some awesome bird research, perhaps participate in a fun field trip, and have the opportunity to mingle with some fellow 'bird nerds'. Upon learning that the conference was to be moved online, I processed that now all too familiar emotion of disappointment-mixed-with-resignation and turned my mind to the positives – I'll still get all the cool science, but this time from the comfort of my couch and within close proximity to my snacks!

The conference hosted by the University of Auckland showcased roughly 90 talks over three days, running in four concurrent sessions, so there were plenty of interesting talks to choose from. A bonus of the online format was that we didn't have to make that difficult choice between two interesting talks scheduled at the same time, as all the recordings were available for us to catch up on afterwards. As a NZ-based researcher, it was great for me to be able to extend my network and hear about the fascinating and important research being undertaken by our colleagues across the ditch. As well as the talks, a virtual poster session allowed another 17 researchers to present their work with other delegates able to 'drop-in' to ask questions. There were some very impressive artistic skills displayed on the posters which inspired me to up my game for poster sessions at future conferences. The AOC 2022 excelled in creating a welcoming and supportive vibe for students, which makes all the difference for those of us earlier in our careers.

While I'm sure most would agree that holding a conference virtually is not ideal, it must be said that the conference organisers did a fantastic job and in this age of "you're on mute!" it was very impressive to witness everything running smoothly from beginning to end. The online platform made it very easy to connect with other attendees, and I personally managed to connect with several new people who I look forward to meeting face to face one day soon. The social aspect that is so crucial to a successful conference was kept up with daily 'Birdle' challenges (an ornithological play on 'Wordle' where we guessed a 5-letter bird name), a 'guess that bird' quiz, and networking sessions at the end of each day.

I would like to say a huge thank you to Birds NZ for giving me the opportunity to attend and present my research, and another big mihi to Auckland University for pulling off a fantastic conference under difficult circumstances. I am looking forward to attending the next AOC and while the virtual aspect of the 2022 conference was a resounding success, I very much hope that 2023 will allow us to meet in-person!



Imogen virtually presenting a talk on her PhD research which is looking to develop a genetic method for species identification of seabird fisheries bycatch.