

I had the great privilege of attending the 2025 Australasian Ornithological Conference in Borloo/Perth a few weeks ago, thanks to a Birds New Zealand student travel grant. It was a whirlwind week of exciting science, new friends, and of course lots of birds!

The conference opened with a beautiful Welcome to Country by Wadjuk Nyoongar Elder Simon Forrest and a memorable performance of Wadjuk Nyoongar dance. I started my day in the avian ecotoxicology session and was blown away by some of the research. My honours work investigated mercury concentrations in Grey faced petrel blood and feathers, so this was right up my alley! Later, I had the privilege of chairing one of the Behavioural Ecology sessions. I was a little nervous to undertake such an important task, but the speakers and audience members were incredibly helpful and put me at ease. It was an awesome experience and I am grateful I had the opportunity to participate in this new way. That night, I made my way to the UWA tavern for the student meet and greet quiz. As I didn't know anyone else at the event, I elected to be assigned to a team randomly. I ended up with the loveliest teammates and we managed to snag second place. It was great having this event on the first day, as it allowed me to watch a lot of my new friends' talks, and I hope to reconnect at future bird-centric conferences.

The second day of the conference included my favourite session on seabird conservation. I presented my own research here, on stable isotopes as an indicator of Sooty shearwater diet (Figure 1). I loved sharing my findings with an international audience and was honoured to receive the award for best talk by a New Zealand student at the awards ceremony. Getting my talk out of the way early was great, as I was able to enjoy the rest of the Seabird Conservation session without any nerves. I had listened to some of the speakers at the Pacific Seabird Symposium in Auckland earlier this year, and it was awesome to see the progress they had made in their research since then.

The final day of the conference went by in a blur. Some of my favourite talks tackled the effects of climate change on different species, resonating with my own research on the Sooty shearwater. Others introduced me to species that I was unfamiliar with, such as the White-bellied sea eagle and the Lyre bird. Finally, the documentary screening by Owl Friendly Margaret River tugged at my heart strings and made the perfect ending to the conference program. With my brain and heart full, I made sure to get a good night's sleep in preparation for Friday's field trips.

I decided to squeeze in two excursions before my flight back home Friday night: the Victoria Dam Walk, and the Western Australian Museum Collections Tour. We had stunning weather for the walk, and I was immensely grateful for the expertise of our guides for identifying all the species I saw that day (Figure 2). Some of my favourite finds were the Square tailed kite, the Mistletoe bird, and the red capped parrot. Taking the cake though were the pair of Splendid fairy wrens that showed off their plumage right at the start of our trip, whilst we were waiting in the carpark!!

As the midday heat started to intensify, I was glad to make my way inside for the museum tour. Exploring all the different aspects of the museum collections was fascinating, from skins and bones to wet specimens and preparation laboratories. You could spend weeks in those facilities and still not have seen everything! The curators guiding our tour were incredible and answered all my many questions regarding specimen preparation, biosecurity risks, and day to day proceedings. The day flew by, and before I knew it I was on my flight home to Auckland.

I am deeply grateful to Birds New Zealand for supporting my travel to Perth. Attending AOC broadened my ornithological knowledge and interests, sparked new ideas for my research, and connected me with a vibrant community of like-minded individuals to collaborate with in the future.

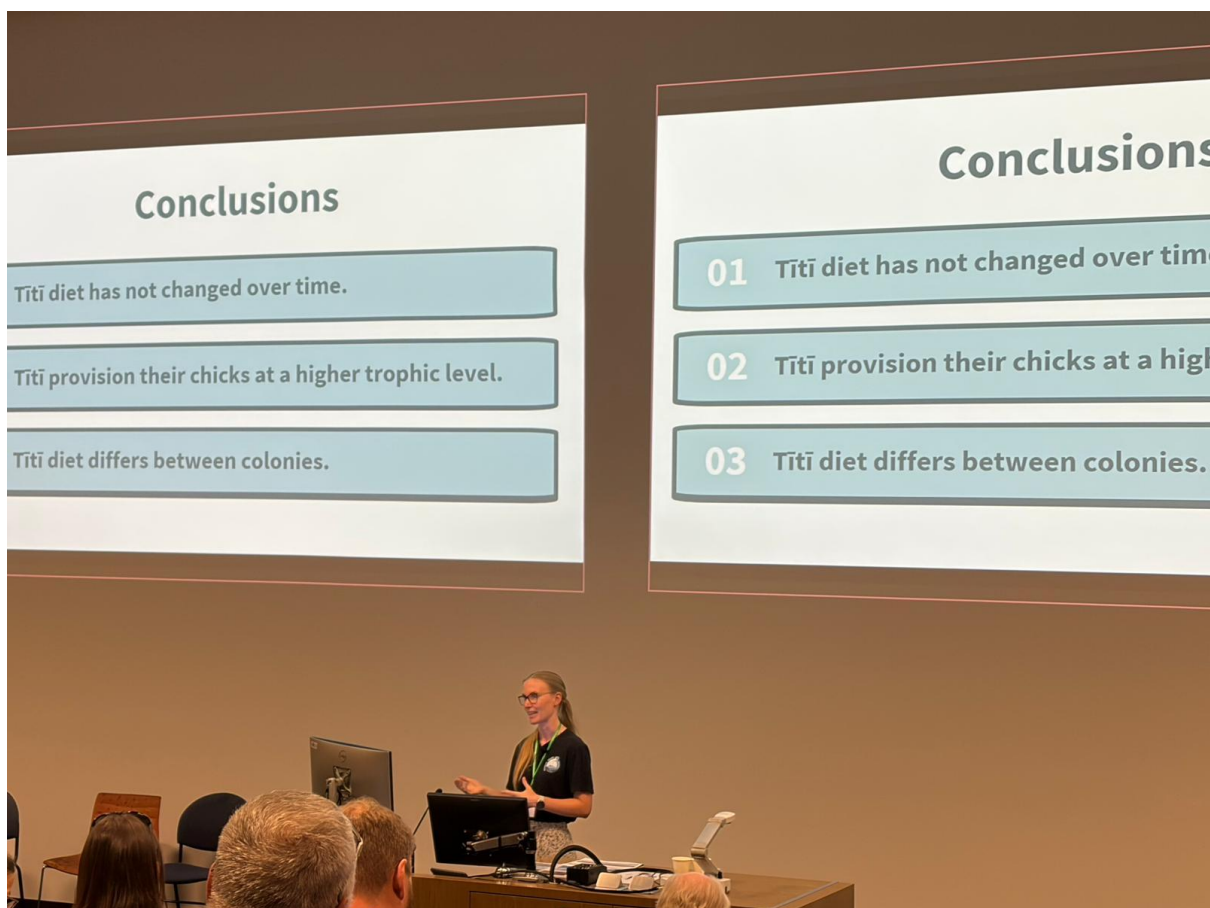


Figure 1: Inka Pleiss presenting her talk titled “Hidden Food Diaries: Stable Isotopes Reveal the Importance of Latitude and Life Stage in Sooty Shearwater Diet” at the 2025 AOC.



Image 2: Bird watching at Victoria Dam.