

Odense, 8th January 2019

For the Attention of the Steering Committee

Between the 2nd and 7th December 2018, I attended the African Bioacoustics Community Conference in Cape Town, South Africa. The conference was hosted by University of Cape Town's Centre for Statistics in Ecology, the Environment and Conservation (SEEC) and Sea Search Research and Conservation; the aim of the conference was to provide a forum for researchers working on every aspect of bio-acoustics in Africa to network and share ideas.

The conference comprised a series of oral presentations (December 3rd–6th), a poster session, panel discussions, and workshops. The talks included both marine and terrestrial themes, and there was a heavy emphasis on monitoring and mitigating human impacts on species and ecosystems. Of particular interest to me was the session on emerging technologies and approaches and developing collaborations and partnerships. Moreover, while my own research is on marine mammals and I was, of course, fascinated by the development of marine projects, I gained many new insights from the talks on terrestrial approaches to similar issues.

During the poster session (December 3rd), I presented an overview of my own work on the critically endangered population of inshore South African Bryde's whales. The work we have conducted so far, using a combination of tagging and passive acoustic methods, and which is the first investigation of the foraging ecology of this cryptic cetacean species, attracted considerable attention from some of the researchers in this field. I not only gathered feedback on the work to date and new ideas on how to progress from here, but also discussed potential collaborations that could extend the project to similar species in different areas. This was a pivotal step forward in my research career, as my interest is in understanding how animals address the same problems in different environments.

Aside from the poster and oral presentations, I also attended panel discussions on two important topics. The first was on the impacts of human generated noise on the ocean environment (December 4th), and combined local and international expertise on a problem that grows as marine industries increase. This discussion was especially interesting to me, as there was a segment on South Africa's developing "Blue Economy", which is likely to directly impact the whales I am currently studying—in fact, one of my project aims is to investigate to what degree this happens, and to estimate the population consequences of acoustic disturbance on these animals. The second panel discussion was on science communication and networking (December 6th). I believe that public engagement and outreach are of critical importance in the implementation of conservation measures. Therefore, it is necessary for academics to step out of our ivory towers and bring our research to the general public,

without the understanding and support of which it is practically impossible to implement successful management schemes. This event gave me some ideas on how better to disseminate my findings and engage with the public and with stakeholders and pushed me to further develop my sci-comm skills.

Finally, I participated in an introductory workshop on machine learning (December 7th), led by Emmanuel Dufourq. Machine learning techniques are developing at a rapid pace and have a daunting array of practical applications that appear far too challenging to learn, to the untrained observer. This workshop was basic enough for a complete beginner to understand but laid thorough groundworks for anyone wishing to apply some of these methods to their research. I left the workshop itching to use some of the things I learned on my own project.

Overall, the conference was very well attended, by researchers and service providers alike. From a scientific perspective, the quality of the research presented was outstanding and thoroughly showcased the impressive work and future potential of bio-acoustic studies in Africa. From the perspective of an early career researcher like myself, it provided an excellent opportunity to network, connect with future collaborators, and be inspired with new ideas. And from an organisational perspective, it was a very ethical conference, e.g., providing vegan food, showing that as a community, we must practice what we preach when it comes to caring about the environment. I believe such conferences are the way forward: they should be supported and participated in, so that people can properly connect and put together resources to advance research together, which will ultimately benefit conservation.

I am grateful to Filamo Mobiiy Grant and University of Bergen to provide the needed fund to attend the conference and I look forward to applying again for a future collaboration.

Sincerely,



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