



The 22nd International Ornithological Congress

A brief report for the James Rennie Bequest Committee

The International Ornithology Congress is a major international conference held for scientific ornithologists once every four years. This time the conference was held in Durban, South Africa and was attended by over 1300 delegates. The conference programme was divided into Plenary Lectures, Symposia, Oral Sessions, Round Table Discussions and poster presentations. In total over 450 posters were presented and there were nearly 500 talks given. The 10 plenary lectures were presented by eminent invited speakers, and included contributions from Peter Berthold and Nick Davies. As you can appreciate the conference was a large and important gathering of the international scientific community.

In attending the conference I had several aims:

- meet as many fellow researches working on the redbilled quelea from across Africa as possible. The redbilled quelea is a notorious pest bird that lives throughout Africa. It is the focus of my PhD.
- arrange contacts for future fieldwork trips to southern Africa
- make contacts with researches working in the area of migration orientation

Quelea Discussions

There were several meetings and a Round Table Discussion exclusively held for quelea research workers. There were representatives from many countries in Africa as well as overseas researchers. The meetings gave me an overview of the priorities of queleas workers on a practical level. The most important issues were those of how best to reduce the amount of damage that quelea cause to crops. Topics discussed included the best methods of destroying quelea whilst minimising costs and environmental impacts.

I was also able to meet Luka Geertsma from the South African Agriculture Department. He extended an open invitation to collect quelea samples in South Africa. In addition I met researchers from Botswana and Namibia who would be willing to act as hosts should I wish to do fieldwork in those two countries.

Migration Studies

Another major aim for me at the conference was to get up to date with current research on migration orientation in passerines. This is relevant as I plan to test quelea for migration orientation preferences in my next fieldtrip. There were several Oral Sessions and Symposia covering the topic which provided me with a good background in the area. Additionally I was able to meet Professor Wolfgang Wiltshcko who has a very successful group working in Frankfurt, Germany. I was able to set up a visit to his laboratory with the aim to see how his group tests their study species and to practice the techniques for myself. This will make my own experiments run much more smoothly and successfully.

In summary

The conference had a very high quality of presentation overall. There were many talks and posters that were directly relevant to my studies. These included: a talk by Wennerberg on the genetic structure of migrating dunlin populations; a talk by Graves on population genetics of a migratory passerine and a talk by Clegg on the population genetics of white-eyes in the south-east Pacific. Each of these provided me with a good background in how to start assessing my own data. These combined with the plethora of information on quelea and migration made the conference a highly valuable event.

Finally I would like to thank the James Rennie Bequest committee for the £400 grant that enabled me to attend the conference.