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The Society of Island Biology Conference in Lipari, Sicily | 3rd-7th July 2023

In early July 2023, I had the opportunity to attend The Society of Island Biology (SIB) conference in the Aeolian Islands, Sicily.

The Aeolian islands are a volcanic archipelago in the Tyrrhenian Sea, north of Sicily. They were a beautiful backdrop for the SIB conference. The conference comprised talks which fell within five major themes: Island biogeography and macroecology, Conservation on islands, Evolution of islands and their biotas, Island ecology and Humans and Islands. There were talks across three different venues and a poster session.

The conference provided an excellent opportunity for me to present research from the first chapter of my PhD. I gave a talk entitled 'Investigating parasite dynamics during a sequential island colonisation using WGS data' in the Island Biogeography and Macroecology section.

In the talk, I outlined a methodology I have developed for identifying parasite infections in the host. I utilise whole genome sequence data (WGS) of the host and look for infecting parasites that have been inadvertently sequenced. I then applied this methodology to the case of the sequential colonisation of the silvereye. In the last 200 years, the birds have colonised from Tasmania to the South Island of New Zealand then out to both the North Island of New Zealand and Chatham Island and finally to Norfolk Island. I showed that we were able to detect a new genus of parasite in the host populations from each island population along the colonisation continuum, providing exciting insights into parasite dynamics during island colonisation that may differ from other traits such as genetic diversity.

This was the first conference organised by the Society of Island Biology since the COVID-19 pandemic. I felt very lucky to have been able to attend this conference mid-way through my PhD. The opportunity to present my work, improve my public speaking skills and network with other people in the field during my project has been highly valuable.

I was also able to attend a huge variety of talks during the conference. I particularly enjoyed the keynote by Guida Santos on how the extinction of threatened species might change functional diversity on islands. I was able to consider a field of ecology that I had not previously been exposed to.

During the conference, we had the opportunity to attend a day trip to explore another island in the archipelago. I chose the trip to Stromboli, one of the four active volcanos in Italy. After enjoying a scenic boat ride from Lipari, we arrived on the shores of Stromboli to embark on a hike around the volcano. Undeterred by the extreme temperatures, we traversed the volcano and took in much of the interesting flora and fauna that the island has to offer. We were then lucky enough to witness a few eruptions (from a safe distance!) and watch as volcanic debris ran into the sea.

Overall, I relished the opportunity to disseminate my research to an interdisciplinary audience of researchers and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I am very grateful to the Royal Society of Biology for awarding me a travel grant, without which I would not have been able to attend.



Figure 1: Here I am (obscured by darkness) presenting my research.



Figure 2: Myself and other conference attendees during the hike on Stromboli.



Figure 3: Lava field on Stromboli