





The 20th International Bat Research Conference in Cairns, Australia

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ABSTRACT

The 20th International Bat Research Conference was held in August 2025 in Cairns, Queensland, at the edge of Australia's Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Hosted by the Australasian Bat Society and the Pacific Bat Conservation Network, the conference brought together a global community of researchers, managers and conservation practitioners to share advances in bat biology and conservation. The conference attracted 507 delegates from 58 countries in person, with a further 70 delegates online, reinforcing its role as a major international forum for chiropteran science. Four plenaries framed the program: long-term monitoring and conservation outcomes, challenges of research in resource-limited regions, the role of public engagement in shifting perceptions, and a vision for global collaboration through integrated networks. Across 16 formal symposiums, 16 themed sessions and 7 workshops, Australian research featured strongly, including advances in fruit bat ecology and management, disease ecology within a One Health framework, wind-energy interactions, and emerging tools in bioacoustics and genomics. A symposium on bat conservation research in Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA), supported by a workshop on that topic, advanced methods to identify bats as KBA trigger species and align monitoring with global standards, linking Australian and regional priorities to site-based conservation worldwide. By integrating the 10th National Flying-fox Forum, the conference created a platform for dialogue between science, policy and on-ground management concerning Australian flying-foxes. This facilitated pivotal collaborations for the conservation of federally and state-listed threatened species, while supporting the National Flying-fox Monitoring Program. Field trips across northern Queensland and overseas expeditions to the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (Papua New Guinea) and Nguna Island (Vanuatu), showcased regional bat diversity and underscored Australia's role as a hub for Asia-Pacific capacity building. The 20th International Bat Research Conference was more than a scientific meeting: it consolidated partnerships, sharpened tools for evidence-based management, highlighted the need for long-term population monitoring, and helped advance an ambitious agenda for transboundary bat conservation in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Australasian Bat Society, Chiroptera, collaboration, conservation practitioners, long-term monitoring, Pacific Bat Conservation Network, policy makers, public engagement, research resources, researchers, students, wildlife managers.

Introduction

Bats make up about a fifth of the world's diversity of mammals and are the only ones capable of true flight (Racey 2015). As the order Chiroptera, bats hold a certain fascination for many scientists, wildlife managers and other interest groups (Boëte and Morand 2016), while receiving a wide spectrum of perceptions from the broader public (Lunney and Moon 2011; Hoffmaster *et al.* 2016; Mo *et al.* 2023a, 2024). Consequently, there is a vast spectrum of research themes centred around bats, including biology and ecology (Arbour *et al.* 2021; Liu *et al.* 2024), ecosystem services (Ramírez-Fráncel *et al.* 2022; Maslo *et al.* 2022), taxonomy (Baird *et al.* 2021; Kruskop and Artyushin 2021), palaeontology (Rietbergen *et al.* 2023), anthropogenic impacts (Browning *et al.* 2021; Tanalgo *et al.* 2023) including bats as sentinels of climate change impacts (Welbergen 2012; Festa *et al.* 2023),

disease pathology (Hoyt *et al.* 2021; Van Brussel and Holmes 2022; Szentivanyi *et al.* 2023) and human-bat interactions (Currey *et al.* 2018; Straka *et al.* 2021), and many other research topics.

Table 1. Locations and dates of the International Bat Research Conferences to date.

No.	Location	Dates
1	Hluboká, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic)	6–9 September 1968
2	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	17–22 March 1970
3	Plitvice, Yugoslavia	5–10 September 1972
4	Nairobi, Kenya	22–30 September 1975
5	Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA	6–13 August 1978
6	Ile Ife, Nigeria	20 August–3 September 1981
7	Aberdeen, Scotland	19–23 August 1985
8	Sydney, Australia	9–15 July 1989
9	Madurai, India	3–7 August 1992
10	Boston, Massachusetts, USA	6–11 August 1995
11	Pirenópolis, Brazil	2–6 August 1998
12	Bangi, Malaysia	5–9 August 2001
13	Mikolajki, Poland	23–27 August 2004
14	Merida, Mexico	19–23 August 2007
15	Prague, Czech Republic	23–27 August 2010
16	San José, Costa Rica	11–16 August 2013
17	Umhlanga, South Africa	31 July–5 August 2016
18	Phuket, Thailand	28 July–1 August 2019
19	Austin, Texas, USA	7–12 August 2022
20	Cairns, Australia	3–8 August 2025

The International Bat Research Conference was established as a global touchpoint for the broad array of people working in bat research, conservation and management to come together every 3 years to share knowledge and experiences about bats. Since the first conference in Hluboká in Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic) in September 1968, the conference has been held in a different part of the world over the past 57 years, initially in European countries for the first three conferences before branching into Africa in 1975 and North America in 1978 (Table 1; Fig. 1). Australia first hosted the conference in 1989 in Sydney (Lunney 1989), which marked the first time the International Bat Research Conference was held in the Asia-Pacific region.

The 20th International Bat Research Conference in Cairns, Queensland was held 3–8 August 2025 (Fig. 2). It was the second time the conference was held in Australia, making Australia one of only three countries to have had the conference more than once. The conference was hosted by the Australasian Bat Society and Pacific Bat Conservation Network, with members of both organisations forming the organising committee (Table 2). The conference was attended by 507 in-person delegates from 58 countries (Fig. 1). Conference chair Professor Justin Welbergen remarked on these impressive numbers in his opening address (Fig. 3), reinforcing the role of the International Bat Research Conference as a major international forum for chiropteran science. With the Cairns Convention Centre providing a convenient location for Australian stakeholders, there were a total of 274 Australian delegates, comprised of 121 attendees from Queensland, 67 attendees from New South Wales, 27 attendees from Victoria, 15 attendees from South Australia, 26 attendees from Western Australia, 4 attendees from Tasmania, 7 attendees from the Northern Territory, and 7 attendees from the Australian Capital Territory.

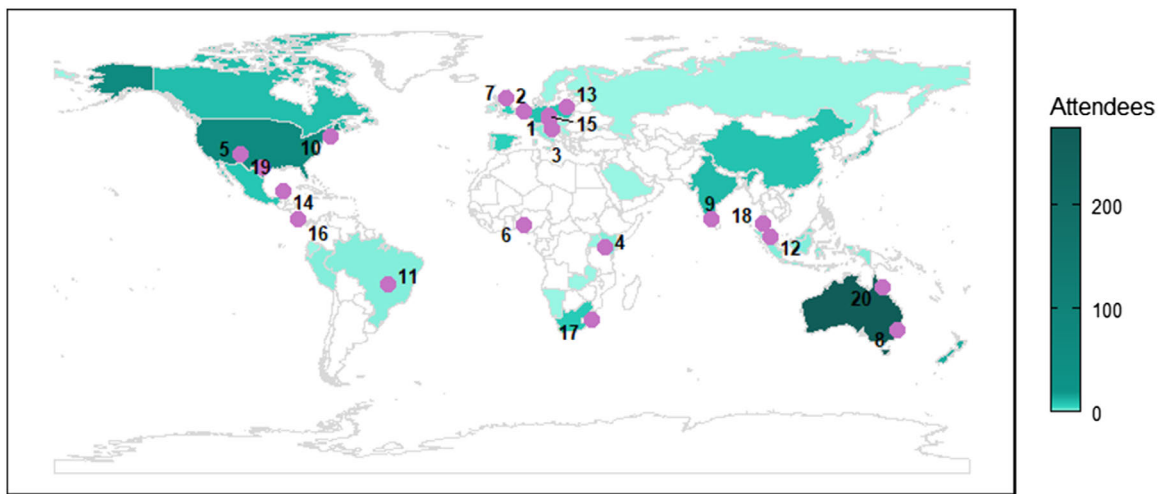


Fig. 1. Hosting countries of the International Bat Research Conference (numbers), and countries represented by delegates at the 20th International Bat Research Conference (shading).



Fig. 2. The conference logo was designed by Queensland wildlife artist Karly Fowler (left) while the artwork *Bats* was created by Arison Kul from Lae, Papua New Guinea (right).

Table 2. Organising committee of the 20th International Bat Research Conference.

Role	Committee members
Chair	Professor Justin Welbergen
Coordinator	Dr Nicola Hanrahan
Assisting coordinator	Ariana Ananda
Other committee members	Dr Lindy Lumsden, Dr Leroy Gonsalves, Maree Treadwell Kerr, Dr Joanna Haddock, Dr David Waldien, Dr Malik Oedin



Fig. 3. Professor Justin Welbergen opening the conference. Photograph: Matthew Mo.

Plenaries

Three plenaries each opened proceedings for the Monday, Tuesday and Thursday of the conference, while a fourth plenary provided the conclusion to the conference presentations on the Friday (Fig. 4).

Dr Brad Law, a Principal Research Scientist at the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, delivered the first plenary with highlights in bat research in Australia to date, showcasing Australian bat research to the international audience. Brad also emphasised

the importance of long-term monitoring, with examples from the North American Bat Monitoring Program (Loeb *et al.* 2015; Neece *et al.* 2019), the United Kingdom’s National Bat Monitoring Programme (Walsh *et al.* 2003), Australia’s own National Flying-fox Monitoring Program (Westcott *et al.* 2015, 2018), and Brad’s own extensive research (e.g. Law *et al.* 2021, 2023, 2025).

Professor Ara Monadjem, formerly at the University of Eswatini and now the Head of the Department of Zoology and Entomology at the University of Pretoria, delivered the second plenary on the challenges of undertaking bat research and conservation in resource-poor countries. His plenary reflected on his own experiences from the African continent but were transferrable to many of the regions represented by other delegates. In the plenary, Ara highlighted the enormous achievement of establishing the African Bat Database, a curated set of 17,285 unique locality records to date of all 266 species of bats from sub-Saharan Africa (Monadjem *et al.* 2024).

The third plenary was delivered by Dr Merlin Tuttle, a world-renowned bat researcher and photographer and founder of both Bat Conservation International and Merlin Tuttle’s Bat Conservation. In his plenary, Merlin spoke about his lifetime of work engaging communities to change perceptions of bats, especially species living in urban areas (Tuttle 2005, 2015).

Professor Tigga Kingston from Texas Tech University in Arizona delivered the fourth plenary on the work she leads with the Global Union of Bat Diversity Networks. This initiative seeks to integrate existing bat research and conservation networks to achieve sustainable bat conservation. Tigga’s plenary provided a fitting bookend to a conference about bringing together bat researchers and enthusiasts from around the globe, with collaboration and resource consolidation being required in the light of the taxonomic and ecological diversity of bats and the complexity of threats they face (Kingston *et al.* 2016).

Concurrent symposiums and themed sessions

The organising committee received more abstracts than anticipated, which formed the wealth of talks available to



Fig. 4. Dr Brad Law (top left), Professor Ara Monadjem (top right), Dr Merlin Tuttle (bottom left) and Professor Tigga Kingston (bottom right) delivering their plenaries. Photographs: Ariana Ananda, Karly Fowler, Matthew Mo and Samantha Yabsley.

delegates through the concurrent symposiums and themed sessions. The organising committee brought together presentations on topical subjects for research, conservation and management, while all other submitted presentations were grouped into themed sessions. There were four concurrent sessions running at a time. In all, there were 281 talks across 16 formal symposiums¹ and 16 themed sessions (Table 3), with Australian research featuring strongly, including advances in flying-fox ecology research and management (Mo and Curran 2025), disease ecology within a One Health framework, wind energy interactions and emerging tools in bioacoustics and genomics, and speakers ranging from students to late-career scientists and wildlife

managers (Fig. 5). In the Supplementary material, S1 provides the full list of speakers and presentation titles.

A key focus of each International Bat Research Conference has been to support students and encourage high quality student presentations. At this conference, the symposiums and themed sessions had 77 full length talks and 12 speed talks delivered by students that were eligible for student awards. As these talks were spread across the four concurrent sessions each day, a large number of judges were needed to assess all presentations, with 34 conference delegates offering to be judges. The quality of the student presentations was impressive, which made it both rewarding and challenging for the judges to select the eight award recipients listed in Table 4.

¹There were 23 talks within the National Flying-fox Forum, comprising of a keynote presentation, updates from government departments and speed talks from students, non-government organisation representatives and local government representatives. These were not included in the count of 281 talks.

Table 3. Concurrent symposiums and themed sessions (italics) run across four conference rooms named for the conference after bat genera.

	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>Macroderma</i>	<i>Myotis</i>	<i>Miniopterus</i>
Day 1: Monday 4 Aug 2025	Old World fruit bats – conservation biology and ecology	Constructed habitats – artificial structures	<i>Acoustics and monitoring approaches</i>	Bat comparative immunology 1
	Old World fruit bats – conservation and management 1	Constructed habitats – human-modified landscapes 1	<i>Development and morphology</i>	Bat comparative immunology 2
	Old World fruit bats – conservation and management 2	Constructed habitats – human-modified landscapes 2	<i>Ecotoxicology and endocrinology</i>	Bat comparative immunology 3
Day 2: Tuesday 5 Aug 2025	Old World fruit bats – conservation and management 3	Conservation research of bats in Key Biodiversity Areas 1	<i>Movement and techniques</i>	Beneficial bats – enhancing pest control and bat conservation 1
	Old World fruit bats – impacts of climate change	Conservation research of bats in Key Biodiversity Areas 2	<i>Conservation</i>	Beneficial bats – enhancing pest control and bat conservation 2
	<i>Conservation and diversity</i>	Conservation research of bats in Key Biodiversity Areas 3	Towards a One Health action plan for the Egyptian Fruit Bat	Beneficial bats – enhancing pest control and bat conservation 3
Day 4: Thursday 7 Aug 2025	Infectious diseases in bats – a One Health perspective 1	Bats and mines – Reclamation, remediation and proactive conservation 1	All seeds big and small – chiropterochory in the tropics 1	<i>Diet and foraging behaviour 1</i>
	Infectious diseases in bats – a One Health perspective 2	Bats and mines – Reclamation, remediation and proactive conservation 2	All seeds big and small – chiropterochory in the tropics 2	<i>Diet and foraging behaviour 2</i>
	Infectious diseases in bats – a One Health perspective 3	<i>Physiology</i>	Mountain bats	<i>Diet and foraging behaviour 3</i>
Day 5: Friday 8 Aug 2025	<i>Infectious diseases in bats 1</i>	<i>Systematics</i>	<i>Rehabilitation and behaviour</i>	Wind energy and bat impacts 1
	<i>Infectious diseases in bats 2</i>	<i>Genetics</i>	Online resources for bat researchers and managers	Wind energy and bat impacts 2
	<i>Roosting ecology and disturbance</i>	Unlocking the power of BatIK genomes 1	<i>Education and social science</i>	Wind energy and bat impacts 3
		Unlocking the power of BatIK genomes 2	<i>Climate change impacts</i>	<i>Techniques</i>

The National Flying-fox Forum, normally a standalone conference held in a different Australian city each year, was integrated as a full-day symposium within the International Bat Research Conference. This synergy, coinciding with the 10th year of the National Flying-fox Forum, brought to the broader conference a platform for dialogue between science, policy and on-ground management of Australian flying-foxes, while consolidating travel costs for delegates of both conferences. The National Flying-fox Forum, in particular, canvassed ongoing stakeholder efforts towards threatened flying-foxes listed under Commonwealth and state legislation (Mo *et al.* 2023a, 2023b; Whitehouse 2024) and the National Flying-fox Monitoring Program (Westcott *et al.* 2015, 2018). In addition to delegates attending in-person, 70 delegates were able to join the National Flying-fox Forum remotely through online streaming.

Posters

A wide range of work from recent student projects to long-running initiatives were showcased across 69 posters displayed in the venue foyer and Cave-ateria. The posters were available

for delegates to browse throughout the conference, with a dedicated poster session on the Thursday afternoon to facilitate delegates meeting the poster authors for productive discussions (Fig. 6). In the Supplementary material, S2 provides the full list of poster authors and titles. There were 21 posters presented by students, which were also judged for student awards (Table 5).

Workshops

Workshops were held on the Wednesday of the conference, concurrent with the National Flying-fox Forum. The workshop topics encompassed scientific and conservation approaches, as well as support for bat researchers towards sustainable and effective careers (Table 6). There were synergies with symposiums, in particular with the workshop on bats as trigger species for Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) following on from the symposium dedicated to that topic, which advanced methods to identify bats as KBA trigger species and align monitoring with global standards, linking Australian and regional priorities to site-based conservation worldwide (Fig. 7).

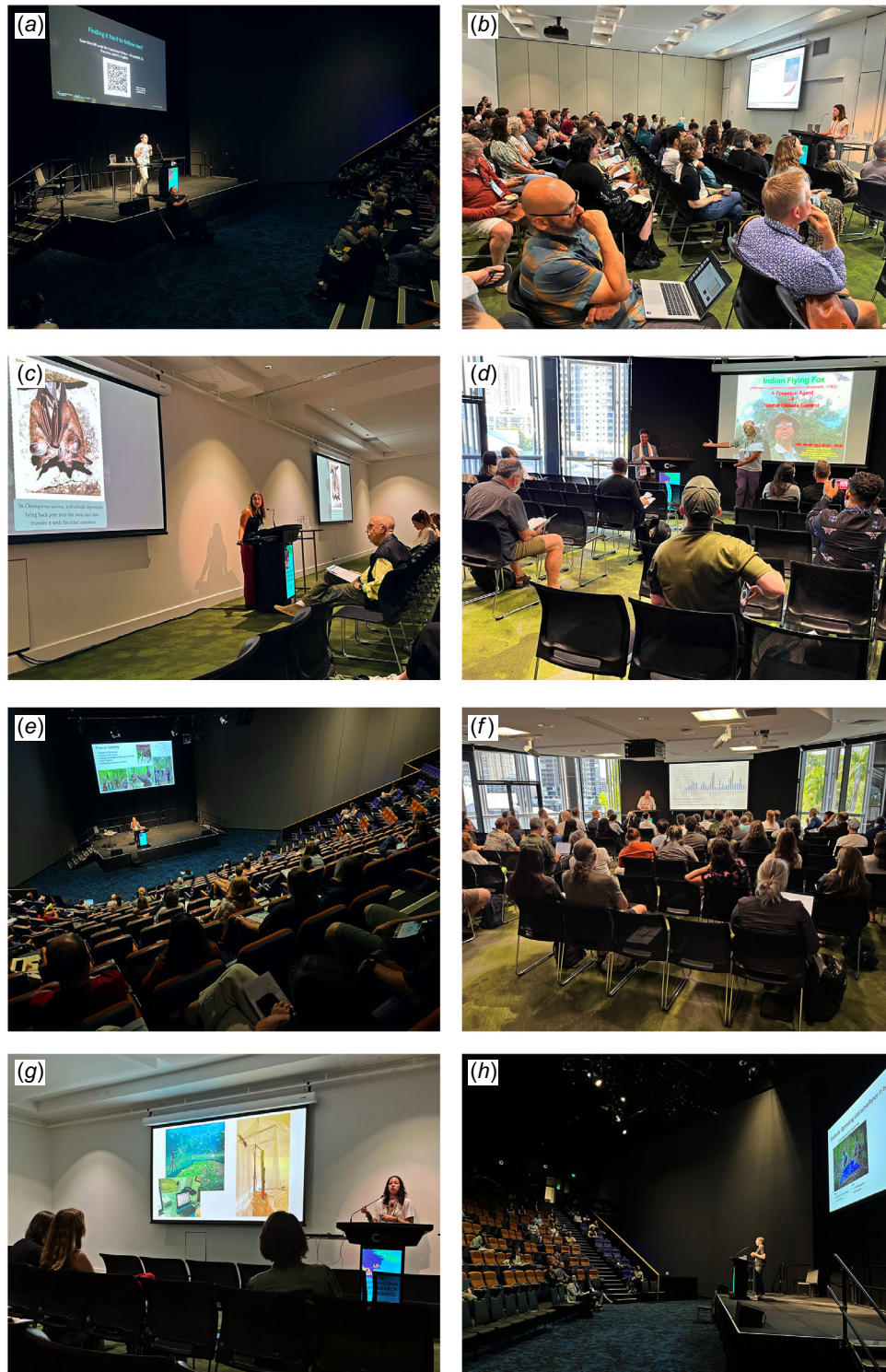


Fig. 5. A diversity of speakers contributing to the concurrent symposiums: (a) Tyron de Kauwe from Sunshine Coast Council, (b) Dr Jessica Meade from Western Sydney University, (c) Marisa Tietge from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, (d) Dr David Waldien from Christopher Newport University introducing Associate Professor Azad Ali from the Bhola Nath College, (e) Alicia Scanlon from the New South Wales Saving our Species program, (f) Adam Fawcett from the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, (g) Associate Professor Maria Sagot from the State University of New York, and (h) Dr Alison Peel from the University of Sydney. Photographs: Matthew Mo.

Table 4. Recipients of student awards for presentations delivered in the concurrent symposiums and themed sessions.

Award	Recipient	Home country
Best student spoken presentation (full length talks), 1st prize	Cecilia Montauban From canopy to cropland: how forest loss alters bat pest-consumption in two African agroecosystems	Peru
Best student spoken presentation (full length talks), 2nd prize	Cooper Tamayo Tree-mendous preferences: the housing market according to Little Forest Bats	Australia
Best student spoken presentation (full length talks), runner-up	Taylor Cangemi Re-sighting errors and tag loss for <i>Myotis lucifugus</i> double marked with PIT tags and bands	Canada
Best student spoken presentation (full length talks), runner-up	Vaibhav Chhaya Echolocation mode shapes nasal morphology in bats	USA
Best student spoken presentation (full length talks), runner-up	Ruvinda de Mel Comparison of the thermal physiology of Lesser Long-eared Bats (<i>Nyctophilus geoffroyi</i>) from discrepant ecosystems	Australia
Best student spoken presentation (full length talks), runner-up	Lexi Frank Field-ready molecular identification of hosts and pathogens using Nanopore Adaptive Sampling	USA
Best student spoken presentation (speed talks), 1st prize	Raffaella Castiglione Introducing the acoustic touchscreen an acoustically triggered interface to investigate bats cognitive abilities	Germany
Best student spoken presentation (speed talks), runner-up	Rachel Leong A One Health perspective on the human-bat interface in a tropical Indian Ocean Island	France

Field trips

There were six field trips offered as part of the conference, showcasing regional bat diversity and on-ground conservation and research. The destinations of four field trips were within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, while two other field trips took conference delegates to the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and Vanuatu. The overseas field trips showcased the diversity of bats in the Asia-Pacific region, giving Australian and international delegates the opportunity to explore remote areas and work closely with local researchers and communities to support conservation efforts on the ground, with conference delegates helping build capacity in the Asia-Pacific region.

Tolga Bat Hospital

There were two daytime field trips to Tolga Bat Hospital, which enabled conference delegates to experience Australia's largest bat rehabilitation facility situated 53 km southwest of

the conference venue in Atherton (Fig. 8). These field trips provided encounters with a range of bats either undergoing rehabilitation or in permanent care (McClean *et al.* 2018), including Spectacled Flying-foxes *Pteropus conspicillatus*, Little Red Flying-foxes *P. scapulatus*, Northern Blossom Bats *Macroglossus minimus*, Eastern Tube-nosed Bats *Nyctimene robinsonii*, Diadem Leaf-nosed Bats *Hipposideros diadema*, and Eastern Free-tailed Bats *Ozimops ridei* (Fig. 9). Delegates experienced the hospital's educational interface provided to visiting members of the public (Laidlaw 2018), including the carefully designed visitor centre (Fig. 10), and how the hospital has been positioned to support numerous research projects (Campbell *et al.* 2003; Buettner *et al.* 2013; Reinhold 2022).

While in the Atherton Tablelands, the field trips included a detour to a nearby Spectacled Flying-fox roost in Peterson Creek, Yungaburra. The site is also a well-known location for spotting Platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* (Andrew 2015), which delegates observed in the creek alongside Eastern Saw-shelled Turtles *Myuchelys latisternum*, as well as a Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo *Dendrolagus lumholtzi* near the car park.

Cattana Wetlands

There were two evening field trips to the Cattana Wetlands Environmental Park, an 80-hectare conservation reserve reclaimed from a former sugarcane farm and sand mining quarry in Smithfield, 14 km northwest of the conference venue. Conference delegates explored the freshwater and saltwater lakes, as well as a 420-m boardwalk through a Feather Palm *Archontophoenix alexandrae* forest. This provided views of foraging Spectacled and Little Red Flying-foxes and Common Blossom Bats *Syconycteris australis*, while bat detectors in use were picking up the echolocation of Large-footed *Myotis macropus*, Little Bent-wing Bats *Miniopterus australis*, Large Bent-wing Bats *M. orianae oceanensis*, Northern Free-tailed Bats *Ozimops lumsdenae*, Eastern Free-tailed Bats and Eastern Horseshoe Bats *Rhinolophus megaphyllus* (Fig. 11). Other wildlife spotted during these field trips included Saltwater Crocodiles *Crocodylus porosus*, White-lipped Tree Frogs *Nyctimystes infrafrenatus*, Dainty Tree Frogs *Ranoidea gracilentata*, Giant White-tailed Rats *Uromys caudimaculatus*, Fawn-footed *Melomys cervinipes*, Comb-crested Jacanas *Irediparra gallinacea*, Australian Pelicans *Pelecanus conspicillatus* and Green Pygmy-Geese *Nettion pulchellus*.

Kuranda and Cairns Botanic Gardens

Conference delegates on this field trip travelled to the Atherton Tablelands township of Kuranda, 19 km northwest of the conference venue, on the famous Skyrail Rainforest Cableway, gliding over the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Upon arrival, experiences at the Rainforestation Nature Park



Fig. 6. Posters were displayed in the venue lobby and a room named the Cave-ateria. Pictured here, (a) Lucy Bacon from the University of Wollongong elaborating on her Honours research to Dr Christopher Turbill from Western Sydney University, (b) Joel Irwin from Griffith University, (c) Haruhito Matsumoto from Doshisha University showing his research data to Dr Marek Uvzl from the National Museum, Prague, (d) Sarah Curran from the Ku-ring-gai Bat Conservation Society and WIRES, (e) Jasmine Wink from Bat Conservation and Rescue Queensland sharing her research findings with Matthew Mo from the New South Wales Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, (f) Skylar Tookes from Christopher Newport University, (g) Natasha Bansal from the EcoQuest Centre for Indigeneity, Ecology and Creativity talking to Dr Stevie Florent from the University of Canterbury and Dr Emma Bennett from Elmoby Ecology, and (h) Maree Treadwell Kerr, President of the Bats and Trees Society of Cairns talking to Tomas Villada Cadavid from Western Sydney University. Photographs: Matthew Mo.

Table 5. Recipients of student awards for posters.

Award	Recipient	Home country
Best student poster presentation, 1st prize	Lucy Bacon Reconstructing the home range of Mt Etna Ghost Bats through the Quaternary using strontium isotope	Australia
Best student poster presentation, runner-up	Cárol Sierra-Durán Bats over rice: assessing the contribution of insectivorous bats to pest suppression in Mexican rice fields	Spain
Best student poster presentation, runner-up	Kelly Sheldrick Building support for 'non-charismatic' species conservation through citizen science: bats and bioacoustics	Australia

Table 6. Concurrent workshops run during the 20th International Bat Research Conference.

Workshop title	Organiser/s and facilitator/s (affiliation/s)
Key Biodiversity Areas: confirming bats as triggers	Dr David Waldien (Bat Conservation International) and Dr Andrew Snyder (Re:wild)
Developing a protocol for bat trait databases and data collation for Australian species	Dr Pia Lentini (Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)
Cross-training in complex systems in bat biology	Dr Melissa Ingala (Centre for Conservation Genomics, Conservation Biology Institute, and Department of Vertebrate Zoology, National Museum of Natural History), Dr M. Elise Lauterbur (University of Vermont) and Rebekah Kading (Colorado State University)
Going batty? A practical mental health workshop for students and early career researchers	Dr Julie Broken-Brow (Titley Scientific), Dr Robert Eres (Deakin University) and Dr Nicola Hanrahan (Charles Darwin University)
Building the capacity of bat biologists to help educators integrate bats into school curricula	Sam Stier (Centre for Learning with Nature)
You want to help study and conserve bats in your country – how to get started?	Dr Malik Oedin (Association Gardiens Des Iles) in collaboration with Mona Doss (Wildlife Acoustics), Rohit Chakravarty (Global South Bats), Leroy Gonsalves (Australasian Bat Society), David Waldien (IUCN Red List), Tyrone Lavery (University of Melbourne), Simon Mickleburgh (Rufford Foundation) and Harry Rust

included exploring the rainforest on board an amphibious World War II DUKW, immersing in local Indigenous culture in the park's Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience, and seeing the captive wildlife displays of Southern Cassowaries *Casuarus casuaris*, Saltwater Crocodiles, and other unique Australian wildlife. For the second half of the day, delegates explored the Kuranda Village before boarding the iconic Kuranda Scenic Railway to return to sea level and exploring the Cairns Botanic Gardens at dusk to experience bats emerging from



Fig. 7. Dr David Waldien listens into a break-out group during the workshop on bats as trigger species for Key Biodiversity Areas. Photograph: Malik Oedin.



Fig. 8. Conference delegates arriving at Tolga Bat Hospital greeted by the facility's founder and director Jennefer Maclean. Photograph: Tolga Bat Hospital.

roosts. After sunset, the field trip concluded with spotlighting, which revealed Striped Possums *Dactylopsila trivirgata* and Papuan Frogmouths *Podargus papuensis* (Fig. 12).

Daintree Rainforest

This field trip provided conference delegates with a comprehensive experience of the World Heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest over 5 days. For the first leg, delegates explored the Australian Wildlife Conservancy's Brooklyn Sanctuary near Mount Carbine and participated in a 2-night bat survey, deploying both acoustic recording and trapping techniques (Hill *et al.* 2015). On the third day, the field trip reached James Cook University's Daintree Research Observatory in Cape Tribulation, 98 km north of Cairns, where delegates experienced a complex mesophyll vine forest from a 47-m canopy crane (Stork 2021). There was further exploration along walking tracks and a visit to a Spectacled Flying-fox roost. On the fourth day, the field trip descended on the Daintree Discovery Centre in Cow Bay, which has an



Fig. 9. Vaibhav Chhaya from the University of Washington photographing a Diadem Leaf-nosed Bat *Hipposideros diadema* during one of the field trips to the Tolga Bat Hospital. Photograph: Tallulah Cunningham.



Fig. 11. A bat detector in action during one of the field trips to the Cattana Wetlands Environment Park. Photograph: Lisa Cawthen.



Fig. 10. Conference delegates experience the public education setup in the Tolga Bat Hospital Visitor Centre. Photograph: Tolga Bat Hospital.

aerial walkway 11 m in height, a 23-m high canopy tower, self-guided walks with the chance of seeing the Southern Cassowary and an interpretive centre that included an invertebrates display and aquarium (McNamara and Prideaux 2010). Exploring biodiversity extended onto the Daintree River, with a boat cruise to observe Saltwater Crocodiles and other wildlife in the late afternoon.

Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea

On this 8-day field trip, conference delegates explored the remote west coast of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Arriving in Buka by air, delegates were received at the airport



Fig. 12. Conference delegates observing nocturnal wildlife on a spotlighting walk in the Cairns Botanic Gardens. Photograph: Matthew Mo.

by a full cultural welcome, with dancing, singing and music before being introduced to local leaders and visiting the local parliament building (Fig. 13). The group then travelled over 3 h by boat, bus and four-wheel drive to Kunua village, where they settled into their accommodation hosted by the Kunua Conservation Network (Novera and Kark 2023). Living with locals provided an authentic cultural experience, supplemented with visits to the local community centre to speak about bats and conservation with the broader village members, a visit to a neighbouring village to plant trees, and a special large-scale community event held at the Ubuko Primary School within the village (Figs 14, 15). All of these activities immersed participants in traditional ceremony, songs and culture.



Fig. 13. Conference delegates receiving a full ceremonial welcome, filled with song and dance, upon landing in Buka, Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. Photograph: Ariana Ananda.



Fig. 15. Michael Pennay and Ariana Ananda from the Australasian Bat Society speaking to Bougainville locals about the importance of community-driven conservation and reflections on their visit. Photograph: Ariana Ananda.



Fig. 14. Conference delegates and Bougainville locals joining together for tree-planting. Photograph: Ariana Ananda.



Fig. 16. Conference delegates examining bats captured in harp traps in the Kunua Village. Photograph: Ariana Ananda.

Over 6 days of fieldwork in lowland forests surrounding the village, delegates participated in mist-netting, harp trapping, acoustic monitoring, and observational surveys to help document the region’s bat species while working directly with local communities. Species captured included the Woodford’s Fruit Bat *Nesonycteris woodfordi*, Solomon’s Naked-backed Fruit Bat *Dobsonia inermis* and Geoffroy’s Rousette *Rousettus amplexicaudatus* (Fig. 16). For observational surveys, delegates trekked to a rumoured flying-fox roost deep within a swamp where they were able to confirm the presence of a Solomons Flying-fox *Pteropus rayneri* colony.

At the culmination of the field trip, the Kunua village women prepared a local feast to farewell the delegates. Arriving back at Buka, the delegates embarked on a day of boating to explore nearby islands, including swimming and snorkelling.

Nguna Island, Vanuatu

On this 6-day field trip, conference delegates explored a conservation area on Nguna Island, a volcanic island located off the north coast of Efate, Vanuatu. The trip provided opportunities to gain insights into the local culture and customary law and first-hand experiences of how the conservation area is managed using traditional practices to achieve

sustainable resource management on the island. Arriving in Port Vila by air, delegates travelled by bus and boat to reach Nguna Island, and were greeted by a community welcome at Mere-Sauwia Village. Community rangers assisted with mist-netting and acoustic surveys, which focused on insectivorous taxa, with captures of Little Bent-winged Bats (sometimes locally referred to as the Little Long-fingered Bat; Lavery and Flannery 2023) and Fawn-coloured Leaf-nosed Bats *Hipposideros cervinus*, and the Small Melanesian Long-fingered Bat *Miniopterus macroneme* and Greater Long-fingered Bat *M. tristis* were recorded acoustically. At the conclusion of the field trip, keen hikers ventured up to Mount Marou, an extinct volcano that is one of Vanuatu's most notable tourist attractions.

Social events and fundraising

Social events throughout the conference provided a more relaxed atmosphere for networking. The Welcome Mixer, the first of four social events, opened the conference on the Sunday afternoon. A Fruit Bats LGBTQ+ Mixer was held the following night and the Bat Trivia Night hosted by the Bats and Trees Society of Cairns on the Thursday night was sold out. The Gala Dinner closed the conference, featuring a bat-inspired fashion parade, announcements of student award recipients, a raffle basket and both live and silent auctions of bat-themed memorabilia. These fundraising efforts raised a combined A\$9906, which will be used for travel grants to support Australasian Bat Society and Pacific Bat Conservation Network members to attend the next International Bat Research Conference.

Closing remarks

The overwhelming feedback from the 20th International Bat Research Conference was that it was a huge success, with a great turnout; a wonderful mix of topics covered by the presentations, workshops and posters; extensive networking opportunities; many social events and field trips that showcased the local and surrounding regions; and a friendly atmosphere that made everyone feel welcome. At the end of the conference, a decision was made on the location for the next International Bat Research Conference. There were strong bids from China, Columbia and India, with Columbia deemed the winner as judged by three rounds of applause for each bid, measured using the scientific approach of a sound level meter.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material can be accessed from the article page online.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



The organising committee of the 20th International Bat Research Conference outside the Cairns Convention Centre. From left to right: Dr Lindy Lumsden, Maree Treadwell Kerr, Professor Justin Welbergen, Dr Nicola Hanrahan, Dr Leroy Gonsalves, Dr David Waldien, Ariana Ananda, and Dr Malik Oedin. Dr Joanna Haddock, not pictured, was on a pregnancy journey and unable to attend the conference. Photograph: Australasian Bat Society.



The Cairns Convention Centre provided ample space for delegates to move between conference rooms and networking areas. Photograph: Daniel Lunney.



The Cave-ateria provided the perfect place for delegates to browse some of the posters while networking over refreshments and engaging sponsors at their trade-stalls. Photograph: Matthew Mo.



The international scope of the conference brought together people with common goals from opposite sides of the globe. Dr Merlin Tuttle, following his plenary on his decades of experience engaging communities, met wildlife artist and Bat Conservation and Rescue Queensland volunteer Karly Fowler, a leading advocate for positive public perceptions of bats in Australia. Providing the backdrop for their meeting was Karly's poster depicting Australia's bats in life-size, which delivers an interactive resource for public engagement. Photograph: Karly Fowler.



The concurrent symposium on the impacts of wind energy infrastructure on bats was particularly well attended. During many of the rotations between speakers, the audience had extended beyond the room door. Photograph: Matthew Mo.



The functionality of concurrent symposiums depended on session chairs adhering to strict schedules. Pictured here, Sarah Curran, co-convenor of the Australasian Bat Society's Flying-fox Expert Group, facilitates question time for Robin Rowland's PhD research with the University of the Sunshine Coast, while Amaranta Ortiz Gomez prepares to go on next to speak about her analysis of North Queensland Wildlife Care's bat rescue data. Photograph: Matthew Mo.



The hosting of the conference in Cairns provided the opportunity for conference delegates to explore the bat fauna of northeastern Queensland. Cairns Regional Council and the Bats and Trees Society of Cairns collaboratively pooled together information and display resources to introduce delegates to the region's bat species and assist with visiting Spectacled Flying-fox roosts near the conference venue. Photograph: Matthew Mo.



With the increasing urbanisation of Spectacled Flying-foxes, there were a number of roosts within walking distance of the Cairns Convention Centre, enabling personal experiences with the bats during conference delegates' commute to and from the conference venue. Photograph: Matthew Mo.



During the evenings, conference delegates were treated to the sight of Spectacled Flying-foxes foraging in street trees throughout Cairns. Photograph: Vaibhav Chhaya.



Attendance numbers were greater than initially forecasted, with the steps leading up to the entrance of the Cairns Convention Centre not visible beneath the volume of conference delegates arriving for the Gala Dinner. Photograph: Edgard David Mason Romo.



The Gala Dinner opens with a red-carpet parade showcasing bat fashion coordinated by Hugh Pitty from the Friends of Glebe Wetlands. Photograph: Ariana Ananda.



From left to right, Tatag Bagus Putra Prakarsa from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Dr Martia Rani Tacharina from Universitas Airlangga, Dr Lindy Lumsden from the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research and Mhd Muhajir Hasibuan from the Institut Teknologi Sumatera mixing at the Gala Dinner. Photograph: Martia Rani Tacharina.



Field trips provided monumental experiences for conference delegates such as carrying out scientific work with local people of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, at the future Kunua Conservation Network research station. Photograph: Ariana Ananda.