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Project: Hoiho Population and tracking: POP2018-02
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Monthly report for the period 25 September 2019 – 21 October 2019

Summary

Field activities in the past month were limited to two more attempts to recover the last satellite tag as well as assisting with nest searches in Aramoana, Papanui and Mahaka. There have been not further satellite transmissions of the second Penguin Bay penguin since 18 September so that it can now be assumed that the device was lost. This also means that we will not be able to access the dive data allowing us to reconstruct the birds' foraging movement more accurately than what can be gleaned from the satellite data (see September 2019 report). One bird at Aramoana was fitted with a GPS dive logger on 18 October 2019.

Results

Penguin Bay, male, bird id: 982 000405532372, tracked since 18 July

After the last satellite fix was received on 18 September 2019, several attempts were made to locate the bird and recover both satellite transmitter and dive logger. When reviewing position fixed it appeared as if the bird may have spent some time in Jacks Bay. However, during nest searches in mid-October no penguin in that breeding colony was fitted with a satellite tag. Considering that the unit did not resume transmitting after the final fix was received it now seems likely that the device was lost making visual identification of the bird difficult. Ongoing monitoring at Penguin Bay over the next few weeks will hopefully clarify the bird's current whereabouts.

Nest searches in Aramoana found two nests although there are plenty of signs of penguins in the area suggesting that at least several loafing birds frequent the area; potentially there is an additional, inaccessible nest high up in the cliff side. On 18 October 2019, one of the breeding hoiho at Aramoana was fitted with a GPS dive logger to record the bird's foraging behaviour during the incubation phase. Mel Young also assisted with nest searches at Papanui where 13 nests were found.

Together with Fergus Sutherland the small breeding colony at Mahaka was visited. One nest was found in a deep cave making it difficult to access the bird. As a result, no logger could be deployed; it is planned to try capturing the bird when it returns to the nest rather than trying to lift it off its clutch.

Next steps

Now that penguins have well and truly settled on their broods, we will try to obtain GPS dive data from breeders to cover the understudied incubation phase of breeding. Due to low numbers of nests in the Catlins (4 at Penguin Bay, 3 at Hina Hina Cove) we intended to focus our efforts on the southern Catlins. However, as nest searches at Tautuku and other South Catlins sites will only be conducted in late October/early November we have been advised not to interfere with birds at these sites until searches have been completed. We hope to deploy devices at Tautuku in the last week of October.

Tracking work on the Bravo Group Stewart Island has been scheduled to commence in the last week of November. Initial searches only found eight active nests on the islands; however, there may be further nests as searches on Tommy Island were cut short by a change in the weather.