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**Population Dynamics of the Saddleback Population on
Mokoia Island and Implications for reintroduction to the
mainland**

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Abstract

The saddleback (*Philesturnus carunculatus*) is an endemic New Zealand forest bird that no longer occurs on the mainland. It is thought that predation from introduced species (especially rodents) led to its extinction except on offshore islands. In April 1992, 36 saddlebacks were released onto Mokoia Island, a 135 ha island in Lake Rotorua. Using data collected from this population over the following five and a half years, I estimated parameters to describe the population's demography.

Survival was modelled by mark-recapture analysis, using re-sighting data for banded birds. Survival was found to be age dependent, with two classes, adult and juvenile. The juvenile age class consisted of birds in their first nine months. All other ages were treated as adult. Adult survival was density independent, while juvenile survival was density dependent. The juvenile survival rate was initially close to the adult rate, but declined as the number of pairs on the island increased. There was a male bias in the sex ratio of birds surviving their first nine months, but the cause for this was not ascertained.

Reproductive success was related to the age of the parents, with two classes for both males and females. For both sexes, first year breeders produced fewer fledglings than older birds. A density dependent decline in the population's reproductive success was also found.

Using parameter estimates that took these factors into account, I created a model to simulate the Mokoia Island saddleback population. My model predicted a mean population growth trajectory that closely matched the observed population growth on the island. After the establishment phase (a period of rapid growth) the simulated population reached a mean density of 103 pairs, with 44 unpaired males, around which the population fluctuated.

Once the basic model structure had been established, I added a routine to simulate the poison drop that occurred on island in September 1996. Using mark-recapture analysis, I estimated that the poison drop killed 27% of the birds. However, the simulations model predicted that this mortality would not affect the population's viability.

I altered the model structure so that effects of predation could be included, to simulate a reintroduction onto the mainland. I also added annual and biennial poisoning regimes to see if these could be used to counteract the effects of predation, and at what predation levels they would prove beneficial to the saddleback population. To do this I assumed that a poison drop would result in no predation for six months, then predation would return to normal levels. Annual poisoning was better at increasing the population's viability than biennial poisoning, but neither allowed the population's persistence at predation levels that would probably occur on the mainland.

I also looked at the effects of harvesting the island population, to see what the maximum sustainable rates were. The results from this indicated that the up to 139 birds could be harvested from the population at a single occasion without affecting population's viability, if the population was left to recover afterwards.

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Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.0 Scene Setting	1
1.1 Reintroductions	3
1.2 The Saddleback	3
1.3 Mokoia Island	6
1.4 Objectives of this Thesis	8
Chapter 2: Saddleback Demography	
2.0 Abstract	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Analysis of the reproductive data	11
2.2.1 Methods for Reproductive data analysis	11
2.2.2 Location/settlement	11
2.2.3 Individual variation	12
2.2.4 Additional terms fitted	12
2.2.5 Results from analysis of the reproductive data	13
2.2.6 Parameter estimation for the simulated reproduction	18
2.2.7 Environmental stochasticity in reproduction	19
2.3 Analysis of the survival data	20
2.3.1 Methods for the survival analysis	20
2.3.2 Model fitting	21
2.3.3 Model selection	23
2.3.4 Age structure	27
2.3.5 Goodness of fit testing	27
2.3.6 Density dependent effects	30
2.3.7 Season	30
2.3.8 Poison	30
2.3.9 Period after reintroduction	30
2.3.10 Gender	30
2.3.11 Results from survival analysis	32
2.3.12 Results for including gender	32
2.3.13 Survival parameters	33
2.3.14 Environmental stochasticity in survival	33
2.3.15 Maximum age/senescence	34
2.4 Sex ratio	34
2.5 Discussion	34
2.5.1 Saddleback genetics	35
2.5.2 Dispersal	35
2.5.3 Age of first breeding	36
2.5.4 The pair bond	36
2.5.5 Pair quality	36
2.5.6 Use of nest boxes	36
2.5.7 Density dependent effects	37
2.5.8 Sex ratio	38

2.6	Summary	39
Chapter 3:	The model	
3.0	Abstract	41
3.1	Introduction	42
3.1.1	Modelling	42
3.1.2	Population Viability Analysis	43
3.1.3	Individual-Based Modelling	45
3.2	Model structure	46
3.2.1	Sequence of program flow	46
3.2.2	Calculation of the population's growth rate	48
3.2.3	Assigning sex	48
3.2.4	Dispersal	49
3.2.5	Survival	49
3.2.6	Reproduction	49
3.2.7	Stochasticity	51
3.2.8	Assumptions of the model	52
3.3	Sensitivity Analysis	54
3.3.1	Structural sensitivity analysis	54
3.3.2	Parameter sensitivity analysis	55
3.4	Model results	45
3.4.1	Results from structural sensitivity analysis	60
3.4.2	Results from parameter sensitivity analysis	61
3.5	Discussion	64
3.5.1	Structural sensitivity analysis	65
3.5.2	Parameter sensitivity analysis	66
3.6	Summary	67
Chapter 4:	Population management	
4.0	Abstract	69
4.1	Introduction	69
4.1.1	Rodents	70
4.1.2	Use of brodifacoum in rodent control	71
4.2	A. Incorporating the poison drop into the model	72
4.2.1	Results	75
4.2.2	Discussion	77
4.3	B. Is reintroduction onto the mainland feasible?	77
4.3.1	Simulating a population under predation pressure	78
4.3.1.1	Varying juvenile survival, adult survival and reproductive success	78
4.3.1.2	Assessing reintroduction viability	79
4.3.1.3	Incorporating the poison drop into the reintroduction models	80
4.3.2	Additional model assumptions for the inclusion of the poison drop	81
4.3.3	Results	82
4.3.3.1	Varying juvenile survival, adult survival and reproductive success	82
4.3.3.2	Assessing reintroduction viability	82
4.3.3.3	Incorporating poison into the reintroduction models	82
4.3.4	Discussion	89
4.4	C. Harvesting the population	94
4.4.1	Methods for simulating the harvesting of the population	94

4.4.2	Results	95
4.4.3	Discussion	99
References		100
Appendix A: General Linear Models fitted to the reproductive data		114
Appendix B: Program listing		120
Appendix C: Sensitivity Analysis		137