Atlantic Tropical tuna Tagging Programme

ICCAT/AOTTP NEWSLETTER

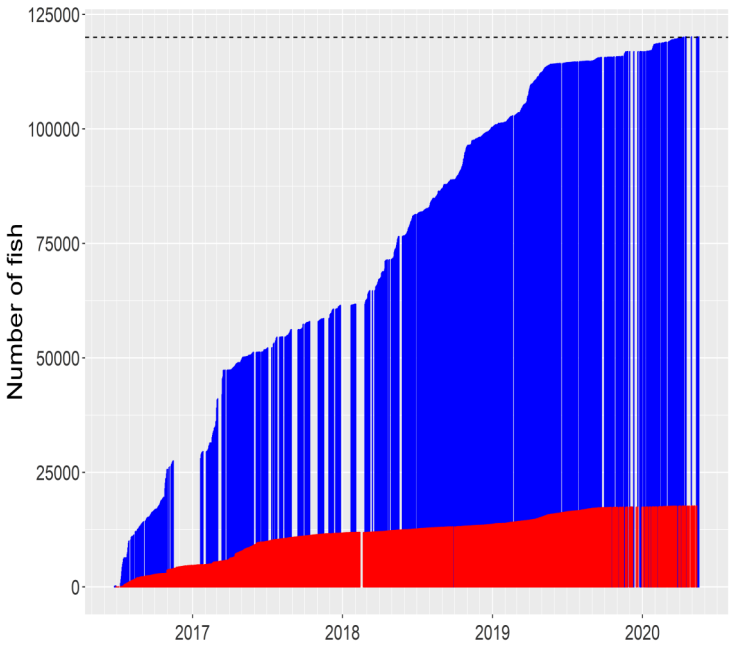
A quarterly newsletter published by the ICCAT Secretariat

No. 11

Double tagged tuna off the Canary Islands

Overview: The AOTTP Programme (http://www.iccat.int/AOTTP/en/) is collecting tag recapture data from tropical tuna fisheries in the Atlantic Ocean to improve their management.

Tagging at sea: AOTTP has nearly now reached its overall tagging target. As of 25 May 2020 a total of 120382 (119464 of which are first time releases, R-1s), tropical tuna have been tagged and released (7933 little tunny, 24197 bigeye, 46938 skipjack, 281 wahoo and 40777 yellowfin). This approximates to a total weight of 230 tonnes of fish! We would like to thank all the tagging teams and commercial crews for this achievement. Tagging is ongoing (832 fish tagged so far) off the USA, although the pandemic has inevitably slowed down progress. The team in St Helena recently exceeded their target to tag 5600 tuna. Tagging started there in May 2018 and an amazing 161 tagging trips were done with much appreciated cooperation from local fishers.



Cumulative numbers of tuna tagged (blue) and recovered (red) since AOTTP began. Dotted horizontal line represents overall AOTTP tagging target of 120,000 tunas.

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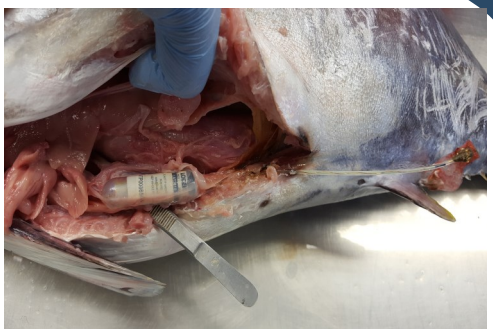
Inserting an internal tag during a training session on São Tomé e Príncipe

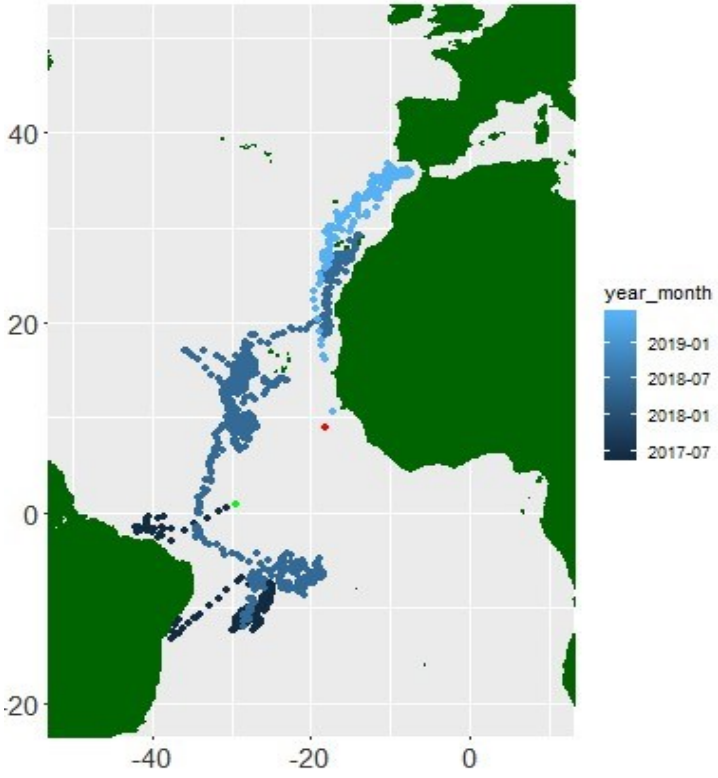
Internal tag sutured into fish. Note the stalk for collecting data on light.



The recovery of Serial Number 2633 internal tag in the Canary Islands.

Tag recoveries: AOTTP has now recovered 17084 tags in total (14%) and they are still being reported although the rate has fallen recently since we are now tagging and releasing relatively few fish.

Internal/archival tags: These electronic tags are sutured into the ventral cavity of the fish, from where they collect data on internal and external temperature, depth and light levels. Fish carrying these tags have to be re-caught and the tag then reported and sent to us. A substantial reward (1000€) is offered as an incentive for reporting these tags since the data are so valuable. Once downloaded from the tag the data collected enable the approximate location of the fish to be estimated. The tags used by AOTTP are capable of taking a sample every 15 seconds for 8 years! So far, AOTTP has deployed over 400 archival tags and recovered more than 40. Recently we have had time to examine data from recovered archival tags in detail, with the principal objective of using the depth profiles to validate the accuracy of the date and time of recapture. Preliminary tracks reveal the extensive migrations of these amazing tuna fish. The Brazilian team , for example, tagged a 70cm yellowfin tuna off the St Peter and St Paul Islands on 7th October 2017 which was recovered, after having grown to 129cm 557 days later, off the coast of West Africa. This fish crossed the Atlantic and got as far north as the coast of southern Spain (see map).



Preliminary track estimated for a yellowfin tuna (Serial Number 2868) released at St Peter and Paul Islands (green point)

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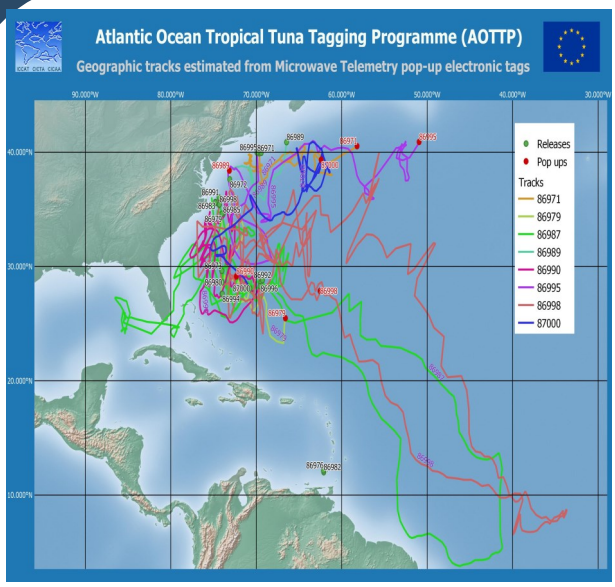

Recent pop-up tag tracks from western Atlantic

Lisa Ailloud and Hugo Maxwell at SCRS tag-finder lottery presentation in September 2019

Other news

- AOTTP was evaluated in late 2019 and the conclusions were largely positive. Thanks to the tag recovery teams that hosted evaluators in Brazil and West Africa. Problems highlighted were tag-seeding (reporting rate) and the ongoing difficulties in recovering tags and metadata from Asian longliners.
- We are starting to estimate interesting geographic tracks from pop-up tags (courtesy of Large Pelagic Research Center) deployed in the Western Atlantic, see map above.
- A three-month no-cost extension to AOTTP to compensate for issues caused by the pandemic is being discussed with DG-DEVCO.
- Everyone at the ICCAT Secretariat is now teleworking. AOTTP Coordination is still hearing from you, though thanks, and data continue to be sent to us by Telegram and uploaded to the database. Please all keep safe in these difficult times.
- The AOTTP Final Symposium (scheduled for June 2020) was postponed due to the pandemic, but will be re-scheduled for early 2021 (see https://www.iccat.int/aottp/en/aottp-symposium.html for updates) subject to the no-cost extension.
- AOTTP Assistant Coordinator (Dr Lisa Ailloud) will unfortunately leave ICCAT in July 2020 to continue her fisheries scientific career in the USA. Lisa has made a fantastic contribution to all aspects of the project and we would like to thank her for her hard work and enthusiasm. Lisa will continue to work on tropical tuna biology and on the AOTTP data.
- The scientific research work is progressing well and an impressive number of very interesting draft scientific manuscripts have been submitted to AOTTP Coordination by our two Consortia (CISEF and VIMs) for review.
- We are confident that many scientific firsts will be described by the AOTTP tag and release data. The conventional tag database is freely available https://www.iccat.int/AOTTP/en/# while a decision is expected to be taken soon on procedures for the use of the electronic tag and biological (ageing etc) data. We encourage interested ICCAT scientists to analyze AOTTP data.

Email AOTTP: aottp@iccat.int

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