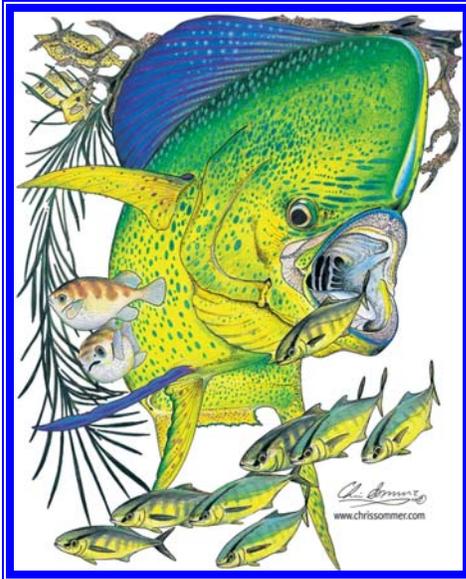


# Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

Made possible by a grant from Costa Del Mar

April 2011



At liberty for 17 days, a dolphin tagged off Miami, Florida, traveled 145 miles to the southwest to be recaptured off Key West. Map by Google Earth.

## An “I Told You So” Recovery

This tag recovery is going to make some south Florida fishermen feel vindicated, while I have to listen to some “I told you so” phone calls.

It has finally happened. Nine years into this study and there is an apparent southerly movement exhibited by a dolphin off southeast Florida. The existence of a fall southerly migration by dolphin off south Florida has been a point of discussion with numerous fishermen for many years. My position has been that the recapture data did not support their hypothesis. However, I cannot readily explain away this movement.

This important, though somewhat confusing piece of information had its beginning off Miami, Florida, on March 5, 2011. This was a day when Capt. Bouncer Smith tagged and released 11 dolphin during one of his charter trips aboard his boat *Bouncer’s Dusky*. On March 22, 2011, Capt. Richard Houde recovered the tagged fish due south of Key West, Florida, during a charter fishing trip aboard his boat *Southbound*. The tagged-fish remained at liberty for only 17 days before biting another baited hook.

The fish had traveled 145 miles to the southwest during its liberty, averaging 8.5 miles per day. Several south Florida anglers that believe in the fall southward migration report dolphin avoid the strong current of the Florida Current/Gulf Stream by moving inshore toward the reef. This would allow them to hitch a ride on the intermittent counter-current that flows along the edge of the reef.

Like the satellite-tagged fish that did not visit the water’s surface for a full day, this fish also displayed a behavior never documented for the species by science. I

would not call these less common behaviors abnormal but rather just some of the many divergent behaviors that the species may exhibit. Think of it in terms of human behavior: most humans do not run in marathons, but a very small percentage do. There are always odd ones.

## More Puerto Rican Gold. Not Bacardi.

This tag recovery gives us the first look at a local movement by dolphinfish tagged off the south coast of Puerto Rico. This is another testament to what the crew of one boat can contribute to our knowledge of dolphinfish. This is the fourth recovery of a dolphin tagged off Puerto Rico by the crew of the *Missing Angel*, owned by Manuel Botello and crewed by Irvin Baez, Alexis Alfalla, Chris Whitley, and Mario Lugo.

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Similar to the three tag recoveries off the north coast of Puerto Rico, this recovery also exhibited a westward movement. Map by Google Earth.

Irvin Baez, of Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, originally caught and tagged the fish on February 10, 2011. The 33-inch bull dolphin was caught during a fishing trip off Guayama, Puerto Rico, aboard the *Missing Angel*. On this day, Manuel Botello and his crew managed to tag ten fish that average more than 31 inches in fork length. By U.S. East Coast standards, these are large fish for tagging.

The fish was recaptured on February 14, 2011, by Alex Oben Martinez of Aquadilla, Puerto Rico, during a fishing trip off Lajas aboard a friend's boat. The fish had traveled more than 50 miles during its four days of liberty, averaging more than 12 miles per day. Its rate of travel was much faster than the pace observed for fish tagged and recovered off the north coast, which ranged from 2.1 to 7.1 miles per day.

If you examine the bottom topography of the sea bed off the north and south coasts, the most prominent features that you see are troughs thousands of feet deep that run east and west. With fish on both shores now exhibiting an east-to-west movement pattern, it may be that they are following these deep trenches as they move westward from the North Atlantic.

## Circle Hook Survey for Anglers

Dr. Andy J. Danylchuk, a friend and assistant professor of fish conservation at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Massachusetts, is involved in an important study regarding the use of circle hooks. He has asked that I share this opportunity for anglers to comment on their experiences with circle hooks with my readers. I encourage you to provide your views on this important topic.



Using circle hooks represent the most important action fishermen can take to enhance survival of released fish.

In an effort to better understand what the angling community thinks about circle hooks, he invites you to complete a short online survey where you will have the opportunity to provide input on this topic. The target community is anglers in North America that have used circle hooks at least once. The information that you provide us is important! By completing the survey, you help ensure that the results are as complete and useful as possible. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time. You cannot be personally identified.

For further information on survey data collection procedures and safeguards regarding confidentiality, contact Dr. Steven Cooke (Associate Professor, Carleton University, Ottawa) at [steven\\_cooke@carleton.ca](mailto:steven_cooke@carleton.ca).

Findings from the survey will be available at [www.carleton.ca/fecpl](http://www.carleton.ca/fecpl) by mid-June. In addition, results from the survey will be incorporated into an overview presentation on biological and social aspects of circle hook use in recreational fisheries at the upcoming first world conference on circle hooks.

Access the survey at <http://app.fluidsurveys.com/s/circlesurvey/>. The survey portal will be open until April 10, 2011.

Please share this with others that you know have experience with circle hooks.

## More on Dennis Braid's Monster Dolphin

In a follow-up conversation with Dennis about his Panamanian trophy dolphin, he was able to shed more light on this magnificent animal. Dennis reported that as he prepared to assist Tred Barta on filming some short video clips, two dockhands used a hand-held scale to weigh the dolphin. One held the scale and fish while the other read the scale, calling out the number 60 but without the type of unit. Dennis immediately though "pounds" and believed that the scale was broken. Only later he realized the weight was in kilograms, indicating the fish weighed 132 pounds.

The Dolphinfish Research Program needs your financial support. No federal funds support this important research. This program exists because of private donations.

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*Length, weight and sex data are needed on dolphin caught from the U.S. Atlantic Coast, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea and Bahamas.*

## Help Requested from Tournaments

Sports fishing clubs and other sponsors of offshore big game tournaments in the Western North Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea are being asked to assist the Dolphinfish Research Program. Sponsors of these events can provide a very valuable service to science by simply recording specific data on each dolphinfish entered into their events.

Tournaments are being asked to measure the fork length for each dolphin that is weighed in for their event and to record the length, weight and sex for the fish. Length-weight information such as this is extremely useful in learning about the life history of the animal and monitoring changes in their body condition between areas and from year to year. A drop in weight per given length between two areas could indicate that a major spawning activity had occurred between the two areas. A drop in the average body weight per length in one area from one year to the next could suggest a lower abundance of food in that year.

In 2010 data on the length, weight and sex of the more than 400 dolphin were collected from Islamorada, Florida, to Oregon Inlet, North Carolina. Contributing data were the Sebastian Inlet Sportfishing Association of Melbourne, Florida, the Blue Water Fishing Club of Florence, South Carolina, Georgetown Blue Marlin Tournament of Georgetown, South Carolina, the Florida Coconuts 24<sup>th</sup> Dolphin Tournament in Key Largo, Florida, and the Florida Sports Fishing Association,

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Cocoa Beach, Florida. Length-weight data were also collected in Oregon Inlet, North Carolina, through the help of the Piedmont Offshore Fishing Club of Greensboro, North Carolina.

Individuals can get involved, too. John Ouellette of Miami, Florida, collected data on 91 fish at the 2nd Annual Dolphin Tournament in Islamorada, Florida, and Mechanical Contractors Association of South Florida Tournament in Key Largo, Florida. It only takes a minute to measure and record this important information, and it is a simple and easy way for consumers of the resource to assist in learning more about the fish so important to their recreation and enjoyment.

If you, your club or tournament would be willing to assist in collecting length-weight data on dolphinfish, please contact Don Hammond by e-mail or telephone using the contact information at the end of this newsletter.

**Your donations to the Dolphin Study are Fully Tax-Deductible**

**Make checks out to:**

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Mail checks to the address below.

## For More Information, Contact

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