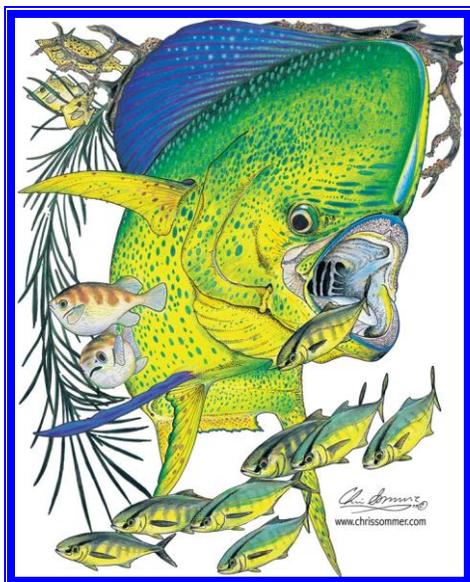


# Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

August 2014



## An Explosion of Recaptures

Only 9 tagged fish were reported recovered in 2014 as of the end of May with four of those made during May. During the 30 days of June there were 21 reported recoveries. Many factors contributed to this phenomenal increase in recoveries, including improved weather and reports of good dolphin fishing, motivating many fishermen to jump in the first available boat. But the primary reason was the tagging of more than 800 dolphin during June by recreational anglers, with the vast majority being released off south Florida and the Keys. This placed an extraordinary number of tagged dolphin at the migratory starting point of their route up the U.S. East Coast, which exposed them to the most fishermen and greatest potential for recovery that they would face during their migration route.



Zack Zuckerman was able to snap this photo of one of the dolphin that he tagged off Eleuthera, Bahamas, as it swam off following its release.

The crew of one boat, Don Gates' *Killin Time II*, provided the fish that were involved in 10 of the tag recoveries. It did not hurt that they tagged 249 dolphin off Cudjoe Key, Florida, during the first two weeks of June. Crew members Darryl Williams, Allen Lewis, Don Gates, Mike Vogt, Beau Benson, and Haley Pizzini contributed fish for tagging that were recaptured. Their fish were recaptured following liberties of zero to five days exhibiting a wide variation in travel speeds ranging from 9 to 75 miles per day.

Ernie Barnett of Leesburg, Florida, recaptured a fish off Marathon, Florida, the same day that it was tagged but 27 miles from where it had been released. Richard Fernandez of Key Largo, Florida, recovered a fish off Cudjoe Key, two days and 38 miles away from its release site, while Ronald Bastron of Tavanier, Florida, recovered a fish off Islamorada, Florida, 47 miles from where it was released. At liberty for three days, one fish traveled only 27 miles to Marathon, where it was caught by Jeff Rella of Marathon, while another fish was able to make it 214 miles to Boynton Beach, Florida, where it was caught by Philip Keller of Lake Worth, Florida.

Four fish were recovered after they had been at liberty for four days. The first fish was recovered off Miami, Florida, 98 miles from its release site by Andres Valdes-Pages, of Homestead, Florida. Another fish was caught off Port Everglades, Florida, 158 miles from its release site, by Al Mitchell of Miami, Florida. The third fish was caught off Jupiter Inlet, Florida, 241 miles from where it was released, by Dale Gawlik of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. The *Killin Time II*'s final recovery in this group was at liberty for five days, traveling 93 miles from its point of release before being recaptured off Key Largo, Florida, by Connor Spellman of Miami, Florida.

There were three more in-state recoveries of dolphin tagged in Florida. Michelle Heiser tagged a fish off Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, that was caught two days later 98 to the north off Ft. Pierce, Florida, by Tom Olkewicz. Dr. William Pomenti tagged a fish off Islamorada that had its freedom for only one day but was able to travel to Port Everglades, 104 miles,

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before being caught by Cye Leland of Davie, Florida. This is one of the fastest travel rates recorded for dolphinfish. Jack Conroy tagged a fish off Islamorada that was just the opposite, one that was laidback. After 19 days of liberty it had only made it to Elliott's Key, Florida, 76 miles, where it was recovered by Jonathan Au of Miami, Florida.

Two tag recoveries in the north end of Exuma Sound in the eastern Bahamas indicate that, like fish in the Tongue of the Ocean sound in the Bahamas, dolphin in this body of water are in no hurry to go anywhere. Two fish tagged by Mark Mitchell in the north end of the sound were recovered in the same general area. One was recaptured by Christopher Eldon of Nassau, Bahamas, three miles away after a liberty of five days. The other was recaptured seven miles away from its release site by Dale Messman of Cary, Illinois, following a liberty of 16 days.

Another Florida in-state recovery was not of the short-term variety. It was tagged by Theresa Kypke of Jacksonville, Florida, off Islamorada August 2, 2013, and it was recovered 10 months later off Jacksonville, Florida, by Richard Moon of Taft, Tennessee. While the release and recapture sites are 453 miles apart, the fish had most likely traveled 3,000 to 4,000 miles up the U.S. Atlantic coast and around the North Atlantic before returning to Florida 296 days later. A fish tagged by Vincent Lifrieri off Port St. Lucie, Florida, also made an over-winter return migration. Tagged September 2, 2013, the fish was recaptured May 19, 2014, by Capt. Rob Burcaw of Cape May Court House, New Jersey, 164 miles off Charleston, South Carolina, during a commercial fishing trip aboard the *Capt. Bob*. Like Theresa Kypke's fish, this fish was recovered 416 miles from where it was released but had most likely traveled 3,000 to 4,000 miles around the western north Atlantic.

General northward movements up the Eastern Seaboard from Florida were exhibited by two recovered fish. The first was a fish tagged by Dr. William Pomenti off Islamorada on May 4, 2014, and was recovered 42 days and 551 miles later by Capt. Robert Olsen off Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. The second fish was tagged on June 8, 2014, by Capt. Bouncer Smith off Miami, Florida. It was recovered 10 days later off Savannah, Georgia, 377 miles from its release site, by Chris Hughes of Charleston, South Carolina, during a research cruise aboard the *R/V Savannah*.

Five of the recaptures involved fish tagged off the Carolinas that exhibited typical northerly movements. Two of the recovered fish were released off South Carolina. One was tagged by Bryant Stokes off Georgetown on May 3, 2014, and was recovered 45 days later 245 miles to the north off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, by Tony Brzinski of Union, Kentucky. The second fish was tagged off Charleston on May 26, 2014, by Capt. Lee Clarke of Charleston, South Carolina, and was at liberty for six days before being caught 82 miles off Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, by Capt. Bill McIntyre

aboard the commercial vessel *Shady Lady*. Three of the tagged fish to be recaptured were tagged by the crew aboard Dr. Will Cathey's *Will Power* off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, on June 20, 2014. The crew was able to tag 65 members of the same school. Two days after their release the first fish was recovered by Jay Kavanagh of Frisco, North Carolina, 30 miles from where it had been released. Four days after being tagged, two fish were recaptured: one by Tom Randall of Buxton, North Carolina, 35 miles from its release site, and the other by Jimmy Hillsman of Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, 61 miles from the release point.



*Don Gates (center) and members of his crew aboard the Killin Time II show proof that you can tag large numbers of dolphin for science and still bring home plenty of fish to eat. The crew aboard the Killin Time II tagged more than 200 fish during a two-week period in June of this year.*

No group of fish showed a wider variation in the speed at which they travel as the 13 recoveries of dolphin tagged off south Florida and the Keys and recovered off Florida the same year. Their rates of travel ranged from four miles per day up to 104 miles per day and averaged 40.3. This group of fish was the fastest travelers during this period. They clearly felt the need to be farther north. The second-fastest travel rates belong to the two fish tagged off south Florida and the Keys that escaped Florida only to end their travels in Georgia and South Carolina. These fish averaged 25.4 miles per day. Comparison of the travel speeds of the fish tagged off South Carolina (10.1 miles per day) and North Carolina (12.9 miles per day) showed them to be starkly slower than the rates observed for Florida fish. Everything is relative and the speed of the fish off the Carolinas is a sizzling rate when it is compared to the movements of the two dolphin in Exuma Sound, Bahamas, which averaged 0.5 miles per day. This body of water has very weak currents similar to the Tongue of the Ocean sound between New Providence and Andros Islands, and fish in both areas commonly exhibit very little movement even over longer periods of time.

It is hard to assign a specific travel speed to fish making a return visit to the U.S. East Coast when their liberty period

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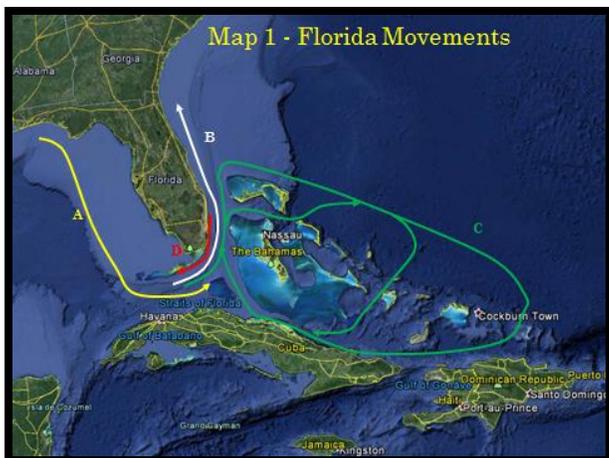
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spans the winter. The two recoveries this period that exhibited this type of movement had very similar speeds of 1.5 and 1.6 miles per day, if you only look at the distance between their release and recovery sites. Hundreds of previous tag recoveries of fish traveling through the same areas, like other recaptures this period, clearly show a far more rapid pace. This indicates that these fish did not linger in this area but left the area and returned. The frequent fall to early spring recovery off Caribbean islands of fish tagged on the East Coast suggests that this is the region East Coast dolphin pass through during the colder periods. With these facts considered, it is likely that these fish could have traveled as much as 3,000 to 4,000 miles during their liberties.

## New Tracking Maps Produced

With twelve years of tag recoveries under its belt, this research program has been able to identify many movement patterns commonly exhibited by dolphin along the U.S. Atlantic Coast, Bahamas, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico. In regions where heavy tagging activity coincides with high fishing effort, such as the U.S. Atlantic Coast, large numbers of tag recoveries can result. This leads to the crisscrossing and overlay of the lines depicting the routes the various recaptured fish traveled, producing a jumble of confusing lines.

To resolve this confusion when trying to follow a particular fish, a set of five maps has been developed that depict various established movement patterns. See the figure below. The tabular summary that describes the recaptures for each year will now include a reference to one of the five maps and a particular route when multiple routes are displayed. This way information on the anglers and boats involved in the recapture, time at liberty, distance traveled, speed of travel and net direction will be available from the table and a general depiction of the route can be found on the referenced map.



One of five maps depicting common movement patterns, this map shows those for Florida region. Typical movements are: A. Gulf of Mexico to Atlantic through the Florida Straits; B. northward along Atlantic coast; C. circumnavigation of Bahamas returning to Florida the same year; and D. southward near shore migration from south Florida to Keys.

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