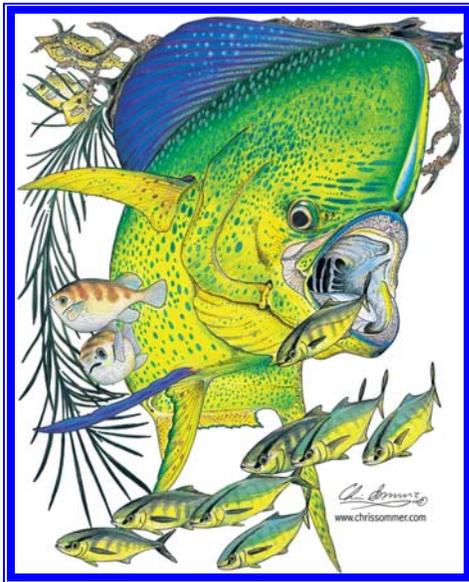


Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

Made possible by a grant from Marine Ventures Foundation

January 2010



Late Fall Movements off South Florida

Four recent tagged-fish recoveries have provided more insight into the late fall movement of dolphin off south Florida. For years now, south Florida anglers have been reporting the existence of a fall southerly migration of dolphin along the south Florida coast. A recovery reported in the last issue of the newsletter indicated the short-term recovery of a fish that had moved a short distance to the south off Ft. Pierce, Florida. However, the latest short-term recoveries, 4 to 20 days, indicate a different direction of movement.

First of the new recoveries was a fish tagged by Tim Heiser on November 20 while fishing off Ft. Lauderdale aboard his boat *Irish Wake* that was recovered four days later off Pompano Beach, Florida. The fish was recovered by Capt. Richard Walser of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, while fishing aboard *Team Fountain* 12 miles north of the original release site.

The remaining three recoveries were the result of Capt. Bouncer Smith's December tagging effort off Miami aboard his boat *Bouncer's Dusky*. A fish tagged December 3 was reported recaptured nine days later by Brad Richard while fishing on the *Sonny Boy* off Stuart, Florida. The fish had traveled 105 miles northward during its liberty. Two of the 19 fish Bouncer tagged on December 7 were involved in the other two recoveries. The first was recovered 13 days later and eight miles north of its release site by Capt. Jimmy David aboard the charter boat *L & H*. The second fish was at liberty for 20 days before being recaptured by Michelle DePoter off Jupiter Inlet, Florida, during a fishing trip aboard the

Conchy Cat. The fish had traveled 90 miles northward, averaging a speed of 4.5 miles per day.

To evaluate the existence of a southerly movement by dolphin off south Florida during the fall would require that specific criteria be met. Fish would need to be tagged during October through December and recovered within 30 days. This would help eliminate short-term movements around and through the Bahamas. A total of eight tag recoveries have met these criteria with all but one exhibiting a net northward movement.

Recognizing the limitations of the small sample, the current data still suggest that dolphin are traveling north off south Florida into the late fall. However, it appears that dolphin are traveling at a greatly reduced speed of nine miles per day on average as opposed to the 24 miles per day dolphin average during the spring and summer.

This brings the number of dolphin tags reported recovered in 2009 to 55. While one tag was recovered from a beach, the rest were taken from fish, making 2009 the second-best year for tag recoveries. When the low number of fish tagged is considered, 2009 had the highest rate of tag recovery reporting recorded for the program. At 4.6 percent, it was almost double the average annual rate.

Anglers interested in a complete listing of the 2009 tag recoveries along with a map depicting their movements should visit the program Web site at

<http://dolphintagging.homestead.com/Map.html>.

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2009 Tagging Trivia

There are many interesting facts about the Dolphin Tagging Study that are not reported. The following highlights some of those little-known facts.

Dolphinfish were tagged over a large portion of the Western Central North Atlantic Ocean and other seas as well. The fish tagged at the most northern point was release off Montauk, New York just shy of 40°N by Capt. Billy McIntyre aboard the *Shady Lady*. Manuel Botello tagged both the fish farthest east, northeast of San Juan, Puerto Rico (east of 066°W) aboard his boat *Missing Angel* and the southern-most fish tagged, off the south-central coast of Puerto Rico (south of 18°N) while fishing aboard the *Missing Carmine*. The fish tagged farthest west was in the Caribbean Sea off Isla Mujeres, Mexico (086°W) and was tagged along with four others by Mike LeFiles of Isla Mujeres aboard his vessel *Jax*.

Additionally, Carmine Vastola of Hong Kong, China tagged nine dolphin aboard his boat *Thai Lady* in the South China Sea. Reports indicate that dolphin were tagged by the new Spanish tagging effort but information on where and how many fish were tagged has not been received.

More fish were tagged on Friday through Sunday than the rest of the week. On any given weekend day from April to October, there were probably dozens of boats fishing blue water that could have tagged fish but did not. The day when the most dolphin were tagged was June 13 when 83 fish were marked and released collectively by boats in the Bahamas, Florida east coast and South Carolina. On June 20 fish were tagged in more areas, Florida Keys, South Florida, Central Florida, South Carolina and North Carolina, than any other day.

The most fish tagged by a single boat crew on a single day goes to Don Gates and his crew aboard *Killin Time II* when on June 10 they tagged 71 fish off Marathon, Florida. Richard DeLizza and crew aboard his *Rock Boat* made an impressive showing off Bimini, Bahamas, on June 13th when they tagged 50 fish.

Historically, the period of December through February sees the lowest tagging activity. Only 69 dolphin have been tagged in December from 2002 through 2008. This December saw a change in activity thanks largely to two taggers. Manuel Botello and his crew aboard the *Missing Angel* tagged 32 dolphin off San Juan, Puerto Rico, which by itself is more than tagged in any prior December. However, it was Bouncer Smith fishing aboard his Miami, Florida-based charter boat *Bouncer's Dusky* who was the top December tagger, marking 47 fish. Tagging activity during December 2009 resulted in 83 fish being tagged. This has already resulted in the recapture of three fish providing information on dolphin movements off south Florida in late fall.

Dolphin Tagging Progress by Zones, Dec. 31, 2009.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	261
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	437
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	281
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	28
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	13
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	70
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	26
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	4
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	3
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		12
11	Gulf of Mexico			9
12	W Central Atlantic			40
13	Caribbean Sea			12
	Total			1196

The ultimate goal for each fish tagged is for it to be recovered and reported, telling its own story about its travels. Fish tagged by 19 boats were recovered this year. The boat generating the most recaptures was Don Gates' boat *Killin Time II* fishing out of Marathon, Florida, that had 20 of its fish reported. Bouncer Smith fishing out of Miami aboard his *Bouncer's Dusky* was responsible for tagging seven fish that were recovered. With five recoveries of fish he tagged, Dave Wilson fishing on his boat *Knot Yet* out of Andros Island, Bahamas, produced the third-highest number of recaptures. Other boats that had multiple fish recovered were Carl Haas's *Rosa Maria* out of Jupiter, Florida; Rob Harris's *Got Ta Go* out of Key West, Florida; Mark Mitchell aboard the *Reel Gator* from Orlando, Florida; and Zehntner Gay's *Hooked Up* out of Islamorada, Florida.

2009 Top Taggers

Thanks to a surge in the December tagging level, the number of dolphin tagged in 2009, 1,196, was only 16 percent below the seven-year average. A total of 74 boats reported tagging dolphin in 2009. Of this number, 22 vessels tagged 10 or more fish with 13 boats tagging 20 or more.

More than 160 anglers provided dolphinfish for tagging. This is not all of the participating anglers since many go unrecorded because some boats tagging large numbers, especially charter boats, do not keep records of their anglers. Program T-shirts were earned by 47 anglers who provided five or more fish for tagging. Nine anglers were responsible for tagging between 20 and 117 fish.

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The top private boat tagging dolphin in 2009 was Don Gates' *Killin Time II* which fishes out of Marathon, Florida. With his crew of 10 anglers, Capt. Gates who hails from Conroe, Texas, was able to tag 311 dolphin primarily during the month of June. This is the fourth year he and his crew have earned this title. Richard DeLizza of Weston, Florida, and his crew aboard the *Rock Boat* tagged the second-highest number of dolphin by a private boat with 98 fish marked. Third-place private boat was earned by Dave Wilson and his crew aboard his *Knot Yet* out of Andros Island, Bahamas, with 66 fish tagged.

Capt. Bouncer Smith's boat *Bouncer's Dusky* out of Miami, Florida, earned the title of Top Charter Boat for tagging 103 dolphin. Second-place was earned by Capt. Jimbo Thomas's boat *Thomas Flyer*, also based in Miami for tagging 52 fish. Capt. Thomas who has won the charter boat division for the past four years was in a virtual tie with Capt. Smith until a hard push in December by Smith gave him a clear win. Tagging 38 dolphin earned Capt. Adam Weins and the *Billing Office* out of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, third-place in the charter boat division. This is Capt. Weins's first year tagging dolphin.

The Top 2009 Angler Award goes to Dave Wilson fishing on his boat *Knot Yet* out of Andros Island, Bahamas for providing 61 fish for tagging. Producing 23 fish for tagging, Rob Harris Jr. fishing aboard the *Got Ta Go* out of Key West, Florida earned the second-place angler. Third-place angler award went to Mark Mitchell of Orlando who provided 22 dolphin for tagging in the Bahamas. Two anglers on the top private boat, *Killin Time II*, did provide more fish for tagging, Don Gates, 117 fish and Allen Lewis, 63 fish, but because a boat can only receive one award, they were not eligible.



Capt. Don Gates will add a new line to his boat, *Killin Time II*'s list of achievements, having earned the title of Top Private Boat in tagging dolphin in 2009.

The award for tagging the most dolphin in areas other than the east coast of Florida was earned by the crew of the *Rock Boat* owned by Richard DeLizza of Weston, Florida. The *Rock Boat* team was able to tag 80 fish during three days of fishing in the Bahamas. Second place was captured by the crew of the *Missing Angel* owned by Manuel Botello of San Juan, Puerto Rico, for tagging 39 dolphin off Puerto Rico. Mike Prendergast of Orlando, Florida, and his crew aboard his boat *Reel Therapy* earned third place, tagging 29 dolphin in the Bahamas.

Year-end Incentive Awards Work



Through the generosity of **Shimano Fishing Tackle** and the **Don Coffey Company** and **Star Rods** and the **Sea Striker Fishing Tackle Company**, the Dolphin Tagging Study has been able to offer four year-end awards as an incentive for anglers to tag more dolphin. A Shimano TLD50 2 speed on a standup Star Rod has been awarded for the most dolphin tagged by a private boat, charter boat, individual angler, and for the boat tagging the most dolphin in areas other than off the east coast of Florida for the past seven years.

These incentive awards are important to the success of the program. Winners of these awards each year typically account for as much as 40 to 50 percent of the total fish tagged each year. In 2009 these winners accounted for 46 percent of the fish tagged. Because of the potential for winning this rod and reel and the title it brings as a top tagger of dolphin, a record number of dolphin were tagged in December this year.

In a recent conversation with Don Gates, a top tagger for several years, he says that while he would still be tagging dolphin, the potential to win a rod and reel does spur him and his crew to put forth additional effort. So, if you run into a Shimano or Sea Striker representative please thank him for his company's loyal support of the Dolphinfish Research Program.

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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Dolphinfish Research is Independent

The Dolphin Tagging Study is part of the Dolphinfish Research Program conducted by Cooperative Science Services, LLC, a private research company based in Charleston, South Carolina. CSS was founded by Don Hammond, a marine fisheries biologist retired from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources after 35 years in fisheries management. The purpose behind the Dolphinfish Research Program is to conduct needed research on dolphinfish which have been ignored by fisheries managers.

As important as dolphin are to the U.S. and world's recreational fisheries, they have been neglected in the basic research of their life histories needed for management. Data currently available on dolphin in U.S. waters cannot determine if the stock is healthy or in decline. Before the Dolphin Tagging Study, hard data did not even exist to confirm the south to north spring/summer migration along the East Coast.

The movements and migration of dolphinfish cannot be visually observed. This forces us to rely on the mark/recapture of fish and the high-tech satellite tracking of fish to show the relationship among dolphin found in various areas of the Atlantic, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico. Such work requires years of study. During its eight years of operation this research program has been extremely successful in documenting movements of U.S. East Coast dolphin to distant areas of the North Atlantic and Caribbean Sea.

The success of the Dolphin Tagging Study is because of the support of private anglers. They are not only the ones doing the tagging and recovering of the tagged fish, they are also the ones who provide funding for the research. Donations to the study in 2009 fell 21 percent below the proposed operating budget, but thanks to a small cushion built up in the previous years, only minor cutbacks were made in the program in 2009.

Honestly, every angler who fishes for dolphin, every offshore fishing organization, and businesses involved in offshore fishing should be supporting this study. Donations do not have to be at the \$500 or \$1,000 level. Contributions of \$20, \$50 or \$100 dollars do help. Please consider donating.



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