

SC Dolphin Tagging Study

July 2004

Pompano Dolphin in Florida Straits

Two photographs and one specimen that have been received since the last newsletter clearly show the presence of pompano dolphin in US waters. Additionally, the project has documented the first known recovery of a pompano dolphin in US waters (see article on tag recoveries).

Rob Harris of Cudjoe Key, FL, a leading tagger for the study, reported that he regularly catches pompanos while fishing for dolphin. He proved this by sending in a specimen that was 16.7 inches (fork length) that he had caught on June 12 mixed in with a surface feeding frenzy of blackfin tuna and common dolphin. This fish is the first specimen of the species to be possessed by the S. C. Department of Natural Resources' Marine Resources Division, and it has been preserved as part of its reference collection.

Two active participants in the study, Bill Baugh of Ramrod Key, FL and Bob DeLizza of Weston, FL, also aided in confirming the pompano dolphin's presence off the coast of south Florida. Baugh sent in a photo of the pompano dolphin he tagged off Ramrod Key in June. On a June outing to Andros Island in the Bahamas, DeLizza reported tagging a pompano in the Florida Straits and provided a picture for verification.

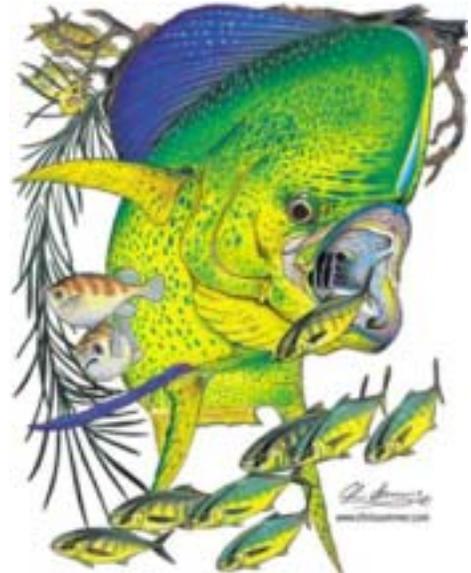
The high level of interest shown by anglers in pompano dolphin has led to the development of a new page on the project's Website. Fishermen can now visit the South Carolina Dolphin Tagging Study Website <http://dolphintagging.homestead.com> to get a list of the characteristics used to identify the two species. Photographs show a side-by-side comparison of the two species.

Record Level of Tag Recoveries in June

The highest number of tagged fish recoveries recorded for one month (14) occurred in June of 2004. In addition to these 14, there were two late reports of fish recovered in May making a total of 16 recovery reports received in June. Among the recoveries was the first record of a tag recovery for pompano dolphin in US waters. Along with the high number of tags reported, several new records were set in time at liberty, speed of travel, and distance traveled by tagged dolphin.

The tagged fish recovered averaged being at liberty for 16.9 days and traveling 113.5 miles from their release sites. Five of the tagged fish recovered were caught in the same zone where they were released. These in-zone recoveries had an average liberty period of 17.8 days and moved an average of 23 miles from the point of release. The remaining 11 recoveries involved fish recaptured in a different zone to the north of where they were tagged and released. The out-of-zone recoveries were at liberty an average of 16.5 days traveling a distance of 154.5 miles from their release sites.

Tom Eckerle wrote "dolphin" for one of the fish he tagged on June 11 off Islamorada. The fish was recovered the next day 27 miles north of its release site by Jack Miller fishing aboard his boat *Ocean Cat*. Captain Miller noted in his recovery information that the tag had come from a "dolphin,"



but he included a photo showing a broadside view of the fish with the tag still in place in his report. Following the review by four qualified fisheries biologists, it was the consensus that the tagged fish is a pompano dolphin. This is the first record of this species being tagged and recovered in US territorial waters.

Two other new records that were set dealt with the shortest time at liberty and highest speed of travel. Chester Kalb of Key West, Florida set a new record for quickest recovery when he recaptured one of the fish he had tagged 35 minutes prior. This fish also recorded the shortest distance traveled moving 0.5 mile before being recaptured. This recapture shows how quickly dolphin will return to feeding. Anthony Antle, Jr. set the stage for the traveling speed record when he tagged a dolphin aboard the *Landscaper* off Islamorada, Florida on June 14. Bill Thiel recaptured the tagged dolphin the next day, June 15, off Port Everglades, 127 miles north-northeast of the release site.

Three recoveries displayed the dolphin's tendency to take up temporary residence in an area. A fish tagged off Charleston, South Carolina by Harry Johnson aboard his boat *Petrel* was recovered by Howard Moseley aboard his boat *Tag Team*, and had moved only 56 miles in 23 days. Another dolphin tagged off Charleston by George Knight aboard *Prowess* had moved only 20 miles during its 36 days of liberty before being recovered by Jonathan Bailey fishing on *Whiplash*. A dolphin tagged by Forrest Engle aboard his boat *Tongue Tide* east of Andros Island, Bahamas, has shown localized residence when it was recovered by Pete Davidson only three miles from its release site after 51 days of freedom.

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Dolphin tagged in zone 2 off the Florida Keys exhibited a much higher recovery rate in June (10 tagged fish recovered) than fish tagged in any other area. These 10 fish were at liberty an average of 3.7 days and traveled an average of 111 miles northward from their release sites. While three of the fish never made it out of zone 2 before being recaptured, seven of the tagged fish did travel to the next zone, zone 3, before being recovered. However, Jupiter Inlet was as far north as any of these fish from the Florida Straits reached before being recaptured.

The SC Dolphin Tagging Research Study is well on the way to reaching a record number of tag recoveries in 2004. The 23 reported tagged fish recoveries received by the end of June 2004 are only two short of the total recoveries received for 2003. These recoveries are providing a wealth of information about the life and movements of dolphin that science had never considered. This year has seen the recovery of fish tagged in zones which have never had recoveries before, zones 1(Bahamas), 7 (southern North Carolina) and 10 (northern mid-Atlantic).

Dolphin Study Moves into Gulf of Mexico

The South Carolina Dolphin Tagging project is expanding to include dolphin in the Gulf of Mexico. The obscurity of the origin and the ultimate destination of dolphin found during the summer in the Florida Straits and south Florida is one of the factors that have prompted the project to expand its scope.

The other factor that influenced the decision is interest in the research project shown by anglers fishing the Gulf. The study has received numerous offers from these fishermen to tag dolphin.

The study, based out of South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources, is seeking assistance from anglers who fish the Gulf of Mexico. Offshore sports fishing boat owners and anglers who fish for dolphin on a regular basis (weekly or several times each month during the season) in the Gulf of Mexico are asked to participate in the tagging study. Interested anglers should visit the project's Website to register, or call the contact shown at the end of the newsletter.

Florida Taggers Quickly Catching Up

Favorable weather during June and an abundance of dolphin in the 16- to 20-inch fork length size range have allowed Florida anglers to rapidly catch up to South Carolina anglers in the number of dolphin tagged for 2004. Florida anglers reported tagging 349 dolphin during June, bringing Florida's total number of dolphin tagged to 444 in 2004. However, the 113 fish reported tagged by anglers off South Carolina keeps this state ahead in with 562 dolphin tagged in 2004.

The southeastern zones of the study area have surged far a head of last year's tagging activity, with over 1,100 dolphin tagged. However, this has not been the trend in all zones. Areas off North Carolina have fallen behind their 2003

tagging level. Tagging in the areas from North Carolina on through the Mid-Atlantic Bight is very important to the study. Only thorough the recovery fish tagged in these zones can we determine what routes and travel speed dolphin use to move south for the winter.

Tagging Progress By Zone as of June 30.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	E. Bahamas	22N	28N	92
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	358
3	South Florida	25N	27N	54
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	32
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	74
6	Southern SC	32N	33N	488
7	N. SC - S. NC	33N	35N	8
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	0
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		0

Photos Requested

We would like to receive photos of your tagging activities. Pictures of anglers releasing tagged dolphin, recapturing tagged fish (including photos of fish with tags in place), or good action shots of dolphin in the water are wanted for use in the newsletter and on the Web site. Digital images are preferred but color slides or prints will also be accepted. Be sure to identify people appearing in the photo and include a statement giving the SC Dolphin Tagging Study authorization to publish the photos.

Send all photos to the project director at the contact information listed below.

For more information on the project, visit
<http://dolphintagging.homestead.com> or contact

Donald L. Hammond
Office of Fisheries Management
Marine Resources Division
SC Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 12559
Charleston, SC 29422
Voice (843) 953-9847
Email hammondd@mrd.dnr.state.sc.us

