

SC Dolphin Tagging Study

July 2005

Moving Further Afield

Just when you think the tag recoveries could not get any more exciting, another golden tag recovery is reported that tops all previous reports. This one was forwarded by Dr. Jaime Mejuto with the Spanish Institute of Oceanography in Coruna Spain.

The charter boat, *Castaway*, operated by Captain Randy Ragland, set the stage for this discovery on June 15, 2004 while fishing out of its home port of Charleston, South Carolina. On that day the crew of the *Castaway* tagged and released 10 dolphin ranging from 22 to 37 inches in fork length to assist the Dolphin Study.

One of these fish, number K032173, was recovered on February 11, 2005 by a commercial longline vessel from Spain. The skipper of the vessel reported the tagged dorado recovery to Dr. Jaime Mejuto with the Spanish Institute of Oceanography who forwarded the information. The captain of the longline vessel reported that the fish had been captured at latitude 34 ° 11'N and longitude 35 ° 57'W or about 535 miles southwest of the Azores Islands.

This position lies roughly 2,500 miles slightly north of east from where it was released. The fish had averaged traveling 10.3 miles per day during its 241 days of freedom. During this period the fish had grown from the 25 inches fork length schoolie released by Captain Ragland's crew to a respectable 47.25 inch fork length fish. This is a growth rate of roughly 2.75 inches per month.

The recovery area is in the northeast quadrant of the Sargasso Sea and is in proximity of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. To reach this area, the dolphin very likely rode the Gulf Stream Current northward through the Mid-Atlantic Bight and then eastward out to 50° W longitude where it shifted to the Azores Current which flows southeasterly to the recapture site.

Had the fish not been recaptured, died of old age or been eaten, you have to wonder where it might have gone. Looking at the major currents in the Atlantic, it may have continued its southeasterly movement toward the coast of Africa until it reached the North Equatorial Current. Riding the North Equatorial Current would have brought it to the Caribbean. Arriving at the southern Caribbean Islands, it could either enter the Caribbean Current or the Antilles Current. Passing between islands, it would enter the Caribbean Current which would take it into the Gulf of Mexico. If it turned north, moving along the eastern side of the Caribbean islands, it would enter the Antilles Current which would transport the dolphin to the US East Coast.

As exciting as the possibility of this giant circular movement may be, it is only a mind-teasing concept. One tag recovery of this nature only shows that individual dolphin may experience a wanderlust. Many more recoveries of a similar nature are needed to establish a clear pattern.

2005 Tagged Fish Recoveries Rise

A total of 25 tagged dolphin recoveries have been reported as of June 30, 2005. These have involved three long-term



recoveries from fish tagged in 2004 with the remaining 22 recoveries arising from dolphin tagged in 2005. With only 684 dolphin tagged as of July 1, 2005, this is a recovery rate of 3.2 percent . . . higher than any previous year.

Dolphin tagged in Zone 2 off the Florida Keys in 2005 were involved in 68 percent of all tag recoveries. Only one of the Zone 2 fish recovered made it out of the state of Florida. The one escapee was tagged by Justin Brown of Pembroke Pines, FL while he was fishing off Islamorada, FL aboard the *Draggin Dreams*. In just 18 days the fish traveled to Cape Hatteras, a distance of 785 miles where Jeff Conley discovered the tagged fish when he was dressing it out for a charter boat group. The remaining fish that were recovered off Florida were at liberty for an average of 3.2 days and traveled an average of 78 miles.

Unlike previous years, almost 82 percent of all recoveries of the 2005 fish were short-term recoveries . . . fish recaptured within 7 days of their release. Short-term recoveries comprised only 38 percent of the recaptures in 2004 and only 31 percent of the recoveries in 2003.

Dolphin tagged in Zone 6 were involved in five of the tag recoveries reported this year. Two, the Mexico and Eastern Atlantic fishes, were long term-recoveries from 2004 tagging. Two of the remaining recoveries were short-term, in-zone with one setting a new minimum liberty period of 5 minutes accomplished by Howard Moseley's Charleston, SC-based charter boat, *Tag Team*. They recaptured a dolphin which they had just tagged and thrown back 5 minutes earlier. This indicates that tagging does not disrupt their normal behavior for very long. The remaining Zone 6 recovery involves a tag

Dolphin Tagging To End in 2005

South of Cape Hatteras – September 1
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sent in from North Carolina with no information and the person reporting the recovery has failed to respond to several inquires for details of the recapture.

The Bahamas, Zone 1, has provided two tag recoveries so far this year. One was a short-term, in-zone recovery of one of Forrest Engles' fish off Andros and the other was the golden fish tagged by the crew of the *Special Lady* that was recaptured off the Georgia coast.

Record levels of recaptures for individual taggers have been noted. Chester Kalb of Key West, fishing on Captain Jim Sharpe's *Sea Boots* out of Big Pine Key, FL, has already had six of his fish recaptured. Don Brown, the *Draggin Dreams*, of Pembroke Pines, FL along with his son, Justin, have had five of their tagged dolphin recovered. Rob Harris's tagging effort aboard his boat *Got Ta Go* out of Key West, FL (Conchy Joe's Tackle) has resulted in three tag recoveries. Captain Charlene Brown, the *Keeper* out of Marathon, FL, and Don Gates' *Killin Time* out of Chulota, FL, have each had two recoveries.

For a complete report on the tag recoveries, log on to the project website at <http://dolphintagging.homestead.com> and click on "map of tags and recaptures" page. Next click on the box of the top map and when it opens up scroll down to the lower right corner to "Map Legend" and click on "view details of recapture data". This table will provide information on who, what and when of the tagged fish recoveries.

Tagging Activity Picks Up

Tagging Progress By Zone as of July 1, 2005

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	E. Bahamas	22N	28N	52
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	256
3	South Florida	25N	27N	155
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	33
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	24
6	Central SC	32N	33N	156
7	N. SC - S. NC	33N	35N	7
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	1
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		0
11	Gulf of Mexico			0

The number of dolphin tagged in 2005 for the SC Dolphin Tagging Study is down 38 percent from the same time period last year. Through out the study, the fishermen in Zones 2, Florida Keys and 6, central South Carolina, have led the tagging effort. In 2005 tagging in Zone 2 is down 25



percent from last year while tagging in Zone 6 is 68 percent below where it was this time in 2004. However, the number of fish tagged this year is still ahead of the same period in 2003.

This is the last year that the general offshore angler has the opportunity to participate in a scientific study of the most important bluewater gamefish, the dolphin. The tagging efforts of fishermen like Randy Ragland, Chester Kalb, John Thomas, Justin Brown, Billy Walker, Rob Harris, Charlene Brown, Bill Baugh and Harry Johnson, Jr. have made significant contributions to our scientific knowledge of dolphin found off the eastern United States.

The information gained from this study will be used to better manage our dolphin fisheries to insure healthy stocks in future years. Please join these conservation-minded anglers in working for a bright tomorrow for the dolphin fisheries.

Dolphin Tagging Photos Requested

Send your digital photos of tagging dolphin 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
P. O. Box 12559
Charleston, SC 29422
Voice (843) 953-9847
Email hammondd@mrd.dnr.state.sc.us

