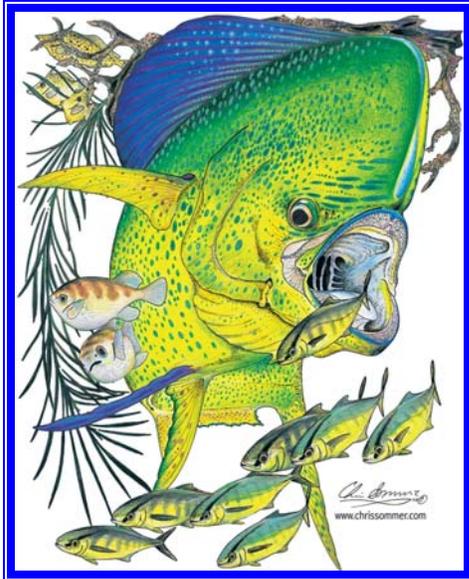


Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

Made possible by a grant from Costa Del Mar

July 2011



Tag Recoveries Pour In

The number of fish tagged in 2011 is among the lowest winter/spring levels of the study. Conversely, the number of tags reported recovered from 2011 tagged fish, 19 fish, is one of the highest levels in the study. The 2011 reported tag recovery rate of 4.17 percent is surpassed only by the 2009 recovery rate of 5.15 percent. Like 2011, the number of fish tagged in 2009 was one of the lowest levels recorded. For comparison, the average recovery rate is between 2.5 and 2.7 percent.

Unfortunately, three of the tag recovery reports offered little useful information. One was a tag deployed in the Florida Keys in May 2006 that was picked up on the beach at Jupiter Inlet, Florida. Two other recoveries involved tags that were mixed up with other data cards or were never reported. The first incidence is unavoidable. The problems with the last two recoveries could have been prevented with more attention by the people tagging.

This period saw the normal reports of fish tagged off the Florida Keys being recovered before they got past south Florida. Four such tag recoveries were received for fish that had been at liberty from 2 to 15 days. The first fish was tagged May 5, 2011, off Ramrod Key, Florida, by Bill Baugh fishing aboard his boat *Ballyhoo*. It was recaptured 15 days later by Danny Friesmuth while fishing aboard the *Reel Control* off Miami, Florida. This fish had traveled an average of 10.9 miles northward each day.

A fish tagged by Bill Pomenti on May 26, 2011, during a trip off Islamorada, Florida, aboard his boat *Scungilli* was the subject of the second recovery. This fish made it

to Haulover Inlet north of Miami, Florida, before being caught by Charles Schmaus during a fishing trip aboard the *Reel Apeal*. At liberty for only two days, this fish must have had a sense of urgency to hurry northward, because it was cruising at 37.7 miles per day.

The third Keys fish to be recaptured was tagged by Ed Bolliger during a May 18, 2011, fishing trip off Key West, Florida, aboard the *Skirt Flirt*. This fish survived seven days, making it to Alligator Light off Islamorada, Florida, before being recovered by Chad Wangen who was fishing on the *Fishhin Pole*. This dolphin exhibited the most leisurely pace among the south Florida recoveries, moving an average of 9.8 miles per day.

It was a Florida Keys visitor, David Wamer from Taylors, South Carolina, who tagged the fourth fish recovered off south Florida this period. The fish was tagged May 24, 2011, during a fishing trip off Marathon on his boat the *Wam Jam*. This fish was able to make it to St. Lucie Inlet, Florida, before it was intercepted by Hugh Beckett of Lighthouse Point, Florida. At liberty for only four days, the fish hustled northward averaging 44 miles per day.

The next tag recovery involves that intriguing category of fish that return to U.S. territorial waters following a winter in warmer distant waters. This story had its beginning September 5, 2010, off Deerfield Beach, Florida, when Steve Wroblewski tagged a dolphin he estimated at 20 inches fork length during a trip aboard his boat *My Rules II*. This fish was recaptured by Jerry Craig of Okeechobee, Florida, just 71 miles north of the original release site. He caught the tagged dolphin during a fishing trip aboard the *Blue Goose* on May 28, 2011, off St. Lucie Inlet, Florida.

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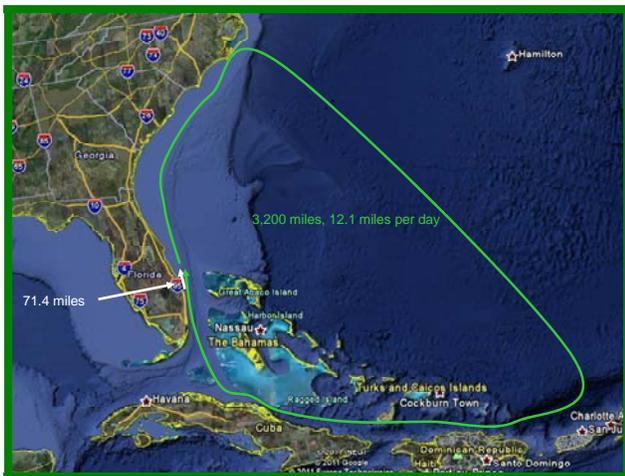


Dolphinfish Research Newsletter

July 2011

Page 2.

This means that the fish was at liberty for 265 days. If you buy the fairy tale that the fish remained in that area the whole time, then it traveled northward at the rate of 0.3 mile per day. However, past recoveries would suggest that the fish traveled northward at least to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, before turning east into the Atlantic Ocean and then catching a southerly current for a ride toward the Caribbean Sea. If it traveled to Puerto Rico and turned west along the island's north shore to follow the deep trench between the Caribbean Island and the Great Bahamas Bank, it would have re-entered the Florida Straits at Cay Sal Bank and started its second pass along the Florida coast. This route would have involved more than 3,200 miles, which may seem like a daunting distance for a small fish to swim, but it would have only required the fish to cover 12.1 miles per day or just ½ mile per hour to complete this trip.



In every long-term recovery anglers want to know how much the fish grew. Unfortunately, the size was estimated by both anglers: 20 inches at release and 36 at recapture. The ability to accurately estimate an animal's size is difficult for most anglers. So the only thing to be said for this fish is that it left the East Coast as a small schoolie and returned as a nice gaffer.

The next group of recoveries involves fish recaptured by anglers off North Carolina. The first recapture story concerns a fish tagged May 7, 2011, by Erik Gehringer during a fishing trip off Charleston, South Carolina, aboard his boat *Daralynn*. Kenneth Gaigler of Ellicott City, Maryland, recovered the fish 31 days later while fishing aboard the *Sailfish* off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The fish was recovered 259 miles northeast of its release site, which would require it to travel an average of only 8.4 miles per day.

A fish from Charleston, South Carolina, was also involved in the second recovery. On May 1, 2011, Howie Teders tagged a dolphin during a fishing trip aboard

Dolphin Tagging Progress by Zones, June 30, 2011.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	43
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	232
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	142
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	36
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	25
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	74
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	19
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	4
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		0
11	Gulf of Mexico			6
12	W Central Atlantic			20
13	Caribbean Sea			24
	Total			625

Nigel Bower's Charleston-based boat *Mistress*. This fish was recaptured off Cape Lookout, North Carolina, 237 miles from its release site, by Mike Riedel of Emerald Isle, North Carolina. Having been at liberty for 41 days, the fish averaged traveling 5.8 miles per day. Unlike the other recaptures reported in this issue, this fish was measured at the beginning, 18.5 inches, and end, 22 inches. This length increase suggests that the fish doubled its weight during its liberty, growing from a two-pound juvenile to a sexually mature fish.



Richard DeLizza, right, sent in this photo of two fish he and his crew caught on a recent trip to Bimini, Bahamas, that while identical in length, clearly show the weight differential between the sexes. The bull, top left, weighed 34 pounds while the cow, lower right, tip the scale at only 18 pounds.

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

Dolphinfish Research Newsletter

July 2011

Page 3.

Charles Sutton of Morehead City, North Carolina, made the final tagged fish recovery reported in this issue. His tag recovery showed an interesting in-state movement. He captured the fish on June 8, 2011, during a trip aboard a private boat off Cape Lookout, North Carolina. The fish was originally tagged two days earlier off Cape Lookout by Mitchell Collette during a fishing trip aboard his boat *Still Drip 'N*. During the two days of liberty the fish swam 12 miles to the northwest, moving closer to shore. This recovery is a good example of why I do not report growths based on estimated lengths. Using the reported estimates, this fish grew six inches in length in two days. Dolphin are fast growing, but not that fast.

These tag recoveries have provided a lot of useful information to both science and fishermen alike. Even the recoveries with incomplete information taught that if anglers are going to participate in this study, they must pay close attention to recording and sending in the information on their fish. The south Florida recaptures clearly demonstrated how much variation exists in the speed at which dolphin travel northward within a region, 9.8 to 44 miles per day. The fish that returned for a second pass along the U.S. East Coast reaffirms the benefit of U.S. anglers' releasing small dolphin. The fish tagged off South Carolina showed how they continue to remain on the western side of the Gulf Stream as they travel north. Their greatly reduced rates of travel, compared to Florida fish, indicate the continued influence of the semi-permanent gyres off the Carolina coast, slowing their northward travel.

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 a major spawning event 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.

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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
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For More Information, Contact

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