

SC Dolphin Tagging Study

June 2005

Bahamian Gold Recovered

Another golden fish has been recovered. This fish establishes the first confirmed link between the dolphin found off the eastside of the Bahamas Islands and the east coast of the United States.

The *Special Lady*, a charter boat out of Mt. Pleasant, SC, traveled to Chub Cay, Bahamas for a few weeks of late winter fishing during March and April of 2005. The boat, owned by Ed Kosnik and captained by John Thomas, has been a strong participant in the dolphin study the past three years. Captain Thomas reported they had decided to tag as many dolphin as possible while in the Bahamas for the Dolphin Tagging Study.

On April 1, while fishing just east of Eleuthera Island, Peter Pritchard of Charleston battled a nice dolphin, estimated to be nearly 50 inches in length, to the boat. The crew was able to quickly tag the fish and watched it dart off when given its freedom. This was just one of a dozen large dolphin tagged and released by the crew of the *Special Lady* during this trip.

Mr. Pritchard's dolphin took another baited hook 37 days later on May 8. This hook belonged to the commercial fishing vessel *Shady Lady* homeport in Montauk, New York and Captained by William McIntyre. Mr. George Hinteregger, a National Marine Fisheries Service observer who happened to be aboard the longline vessel, took the time to record detailed information on the recapture to maximize the tag recovery's value to science.

The *Shady Lady* caught the dolphin while fishing for swordfish 140 miles east of Sapelo Island, Georgia which is 458 miles northwest of where the crew of the *Special Lady* originally released the fish. This is the second consecutive year that the *Shady Lady* has recovered one of the Study's tagged dolphin in this area.



This area is located on the eastside of the Gulf Stream current. It is part the convergence zone where the Antilles Current coming from the eastside of the Bahamas Bank merges with the Gulf Stream current moving up the east coast. This zone is the first areas where the large dolphin traveling northward on the Antilles current would be available to fishermen fishing off the east coast of the US.

Information from this recovery begins to build the case that dolphin caught off the eastern Bahamas are shared with the US east coast from Cape Canaveral, Florida northward. This would suggest that dolphin found off the islands in the northern Caribbean chain (Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, etc.) are members of the same sub-population of dolphin. This information suggests that over fishing of dolphin in these southern waters would impact fishing on the east coast.

Satellite Pop-off Tag Deployed on a Dolphin

Captain Howard Moseley's charter boat *Tag Team*, based out of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, deployed the Study's first archival pop-off satellite tag in a dolphin on June 4th. Mate Tim Schryver used a large dip net to safely lift the large dolphin into the boat to properly implant the tag and remove the hook. When released, the fish vanished instantly in a streak of bubbles.

This high-tech tag is one of seven such devices planned for deployment on dolphin this year. These miniature computers provide a minute by minute log of water temperature and pressure surrounding the fish, along with the geo-position for each day. The big advantage to this tag is that the fish does not have to be recaptured to get the information. After the pre-programmed time interval, the tag releases from the fish, floats to the surface where it downloads its data via satellite back to the manufacturer.

The manufacturer then forwards the data to the Dolphin Tagging Study. The data from these high-tech tags will allow biologists to enter the underwater world of the dolphin for the first time. We will observe their temperature selections and



Nice cow dolphin tagged off North Carolina by Chris Starling. (Photo provided)

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how long they remain at a given temperature. We will also see how much of the vertical water column that they actually use along with the length of time spent at the different depths and the frequency of such movements.

Tagging Activity Picks Up

An improvement in the weather conditions along the east coast and an increased availability of dolphin during May has allowed for an increase in the tagging activity. The 2005 tagging activity is 30 percent behind where it was in May of 2004, but is on par with the 2003 tagging level. Florida anglers have led the tagging effort this year, tagging 64 percent of the dolphin tagged as of May 31st, 2005.

Through the efforts of two boats in the Bahamas, a fair number of dolphin have been tagged. Their efforts have led to the important recovery reported above. Anglers in south Florida and the Florida Keys have led the tagging effort, having marked 238 fish collectively this year. South Carolina anglers have struggled to find dolphin during most of the spring. Subsequently, only 95 fish have been tagged in zones 5 and 6 so far in 2005.

Support for the Dolphin Tagging Study appears to be down among anglers fishing north of South Carolina. No dolphin have been tagged in the Mid Atlantic Bight during 2005. Anglers out of North Carolina have tagged only three fish to date. Similarly, fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico also have not reported tagging any dolphin this year.

Tagging Progress By Zone as of May 31, 2005

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	E. Bahamas	22N	28N	51
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	175
3	South Florida	25N	27N	63
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	27
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	10
6	Southern SC	32N	33N	85
7	N. SC - S. NC	33N	35N	2
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	1
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		0
11	Gulf of Mexico			0

SC DNR Dolphin Tagging Study to End
Anglers asked to stop tagging Dolphin,
South of Hatteras – 1 September 2005
North of Hatteras – 1 October 2005



Crew of Rit Ritter's *Prowess* home ported in Charleston, South Carolina, prepares to release a nice bull they tagged while fishing southeast of Charleston.

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 photo.

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

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