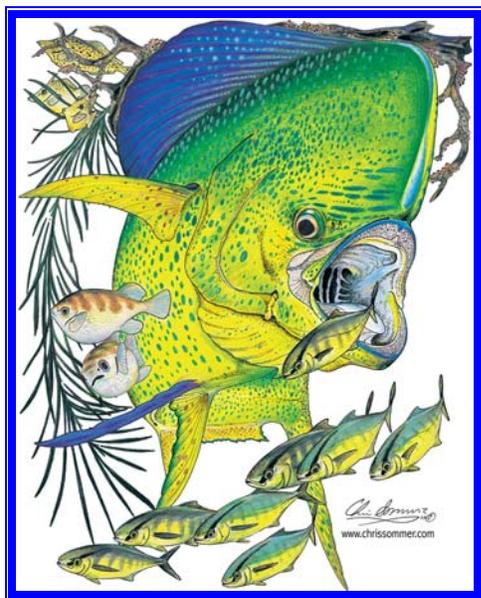


# Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphin Tagging Research Project

May 2006



## Islamorada to Puerto Rico, Recaptures Continue

New tag recoveries continue to provide amazing insight into the life of dolphinfish found off the East Coast. Fish marked and released in 2005 continue to show up in places far from their release site.

The newest recovery is of special interest because of where and when it was released. The 20 inch dolphin was tagged July 23, 2005 off Islamorada, Florida, zone 2 by Justin Brown of Pembroke Pines, Florida, while fishing aboard his father's boat *Draggin Dreams*. After 246 days of freedom, Roberto Rodriguez of Puerto Rico recovered the fish (March 26, 2006) off the southwest tip of Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Sea. Rodriguez reported that the fish was 48 inches in length and weighed 24 pounds. The recovery site was a minimum 1,035 miles from the original release point.

Combining the four years of tagging activity, we find that over 1,900 dolphin were tagged in zone 2. When all years were combined, the number of fish tagged was almost evenly divided between the first and second half of the calendar year. However, the recovery rate for fish tagged in the Florida Straits after July 1 is less than one-tenth the level of those tagged prior to July 1.

Such a large disparity in the recovery rates for the two time periods indicates that different factors were involved after July 1. The summer's higher water temperatures with its lower dissolved oxygen could be resulting in a higher mortality rate of the tagged fish. The other possibility is that these fish do not move northward along the East Coast like the spring fish but rather move east into the Atlantic, west to the Gulf of Mexico or south into the Caribbean.

Recovery of this tagged dolphin off Puerto Rico keeps the theory about movement to another area alive. However, a single recovery does not make such movements the norm. This makes three dolphin tagged on the US East Coast that have been recovered in the Caribbean.

## 2006 Study Underway

Over 1,000 new CSS tags have been distributed for the 2006/07 dolphin tagging study. The new tags are orange in color, carry the CSS address and bear the project's website address. However, they are the same model tag as those previously used and can be applied using the same applicator.

Under a cooperative agreement with the Marine Game Fish Tagging Program of the Marine Resources Division, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources will share the data from dolphin tagged using DNR tags with the CSS Dolphin Study. Any yellow tags left from last year may now be used knowing the information will be forwarded to this research project.

This year's dolphin research appears to be facing two major problems; weather and fuel prices. 2006 is shaping up to have a spring weather pattern plagued with strong high pressure systems packing strong winds that will reduce offshore fishing opportunities. The high cost of fuel will not stop offshore fishing; however, it is likely to reduce the number of fishing trips.

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# CSS Dolphin Tagging Study

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Fishermen typically use the first trips of the year to replenish their seafood supply. Then, when freezers are full and everyone is tired of cleaning fish, anglers get serious about tagging dolphin. Subsequently, a year with limited spring fishing opportunities that also sees anglers making fewer trips could result in fewer tagging opportunities. This means that anglers should make sure they have their tags with them on each trip and seize every opportunity to tag dolphin.

Tagging activity in 2006 has been located in the southern part of the study area, Bahamas and southern Florida. This is the pattern that we expect since dolphin are migrating from the south northward along the US East Coast.

Dolphin Study Tagging Progress by Zones, May 1, 2006

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

Anglers interested in participating in the Dolphin Tagging Study should contact the project director to register.

## Contact the Project at:

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**Donations to the Dolphin Study are  
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Make checks out to:  
HH Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study**

## Donors Making the 2006 Study Possible

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## Financial Support for the Dolphin Study

Fishermen and organizations from Washington, DC, to the Florida Keys have shown how important dolphin research is to them by donating the money needed to keep the research going. Offshore anglers, fishing clubs and conservation organizations have been the leading contributors to keep the Dolphin Tagging Study alive. Grady-White Boats of Greenville, North Carolina, is the first fishing industry company to provide financial support for this important research.

These fishermen have raised \$26,000 of the \$59,000 needed to operate the study this year. CSS is committed to continuing the study through 2006. However, the remaining funding needed for the 2006 project will have to be raised for the study to continue after 2006.

The Dolphin Tagging study has always relied on fishermen to carry out the field work for the research. But now with the fishermen also providing the financial support for the research, it is fisheries research by the fishermen. It is a clear example of recreational anglers not waiting for government to get around to doing needed research on a recreationally important species.