

SC Dolphin Tagging Study

August 2003

Project Status

The number of fishermen volunteering to tag dolphin for the study is now at 536. Out of this number, 138 volunteers have actually used their tag kit. This is a little more than 25 percent actual participation rate.

As of August 1, anglers have tagged 891 dolphins. 2003 tagging activity has more than doubled 2002. This has been accomplished through the efforts of only 104 boats and 217 anglers. Just think about what could be achieved this year if all volunteers make good on their pledge to tag.

Anglers in the Florida Straits, Zone 2, continue to dominate the tagging activity. They were responsible for 48 percent of the dolphin tagged by recreational fishermen in July. SC fishermen fishing zones 5 and 6 marked 22 percent of the dolphin for July. Tagging in Zone 4, Jupiter to St. Augustine area, continues to be far less than last year. It is uncertain whether this is due to a lack of fish. Zone 7 tagging has also improved and should continue with the normal good abundance of school dolphin found in the area during late summer.



Dolphin Study Tagging Progress By Zore

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	E. Bahamas	22N	28N	8
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	353
3	South Florida	25N	27N	147
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	32
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	54
6	Southern SC	32N	33N	245
7	N. SC - S. NC	33N	35N	52
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	0
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		0

How is your fishing zone doing? Have you contributed to the tagging effort in your zone?



Tag Recovery Reports Slow

Only one tag recovery was reported since the last newsletter. A fish tagged by C. Kalb south of Key West June 8th (his fourth fish to be recovered) was recovered by R. Fritznger two days later. Mr. Fritznger reported that the fish was recaptured 16 miles off the Florida coast. He just failed to say what specific point along the state's extensive coastline that he caught it. An attempt to acquire more detailed information on size and location has not been successful.

This is a good example of the normal problems encountered in recovery information. Many fishermen do not realize the importance of tag recoveries to fisheries management. Some anglers are not interested enough to even turn in tags. Those who are willing to take the time to report the tag recovery are often not aware of what information is important regarding the tag recovery.

When a fisherman is reporting the recovery of a tagged fish, they should always include certain basic information. Foremost in the report is their name address and day telephone number. Along with the actual tag, include the specific recovery location, date of recovery, fork length of the fish and its weight (physically measured).

Anglers recovering tagged fish make all of the work that went before them worthwhile and meaningful. Do your part for fisheries management report all tag recoveries.

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Sport Fishermen Provide Support

South Carolina Sport fishermen have gone out of their way to provide assistance to the Dolphin Tagging Study. These fishermen not only have tagged numerous dolphin for the study on their own but they also made their boats available to carry Department of Natural Resources' biologists out at no cost to the study. These trips have allowed the biologists to place special reward tags in dolphin as part of the second phase of the study.

Rit Ritter, owner of the *Prowess* (Charleston), Harry Johnson, owner of the *Petrel* (Mt. Pleasant), Jimmy and Art Hightower owners of the *Triple Play* (Charleston) and Mike Larrow owner of the *Micabe* (Hilton Head) have jointly provided 8 days of offshore fishing to tag dolphin for this study. These trips resulted in 67 dolphin being marked with a special cash reward tag.

A special note of thanks goes out to these and other boat owners in South Carolina and Florida. Their support and generosity has allowed the project to conduct special tagging activities in the eastern Bahamas, Straits of Florida, off South Carolina and in the Mid-Atlantic Bight. The project could not have afforded to conduct such extensive tagging activity in these areas otherwise.

Fall Movements Approach

This study is making great strides in identifying dolphin movements during the spring and summer periods. However, during its first year the study did not receive any reports of tag recoveries November through March.

Dolphin movements during the fall and winter periods have always been a matter of speculation. Do the fish move east towards Bermuda and then move south? Or, do they simply reverse their spring movement following the coast back to where they originated?



Ed Rodriguez of Lake Mary, FL prepares to release a fish that shows a properly placed tag. Courtesy of Ed Rodriguez

As November approaches, dolphin will begin to depart the waters of their northern range. The timing for this movement may be appreciably earlier this year with the colder than usual water mass that has been present along the Mid-Atlantic Bight. The large number of fish that have been tagged in 2003 should increase the likelihood of acquiring information on the fall and winter movements.

Poor Tagging Practices Reduce Recoveries



While this photo was submitted by one boat participating in the tagging study, it is probably indicative of many fishermen assisting the study. Many fishermen do not understand exactly how the tag is to be applied or how fragile a fish is.

This photo exhibits two major problems. The first is that the fish is being held so tightly around the belly that it could suffer serious damage to its internal organs. Secondly, the tag has been inserted in the wrong area and at a bad angle. Inserted in the thin muscle over the head, this tag would likely work its way out in just a matter of days, especially with the additional resistance in the water from the tag angling forward.

The photo in the opposite column shows not only the proper location for the tag to be placed but also that the tag should angle backwards to reduce its drag in the water.

For more information on the project, visit
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