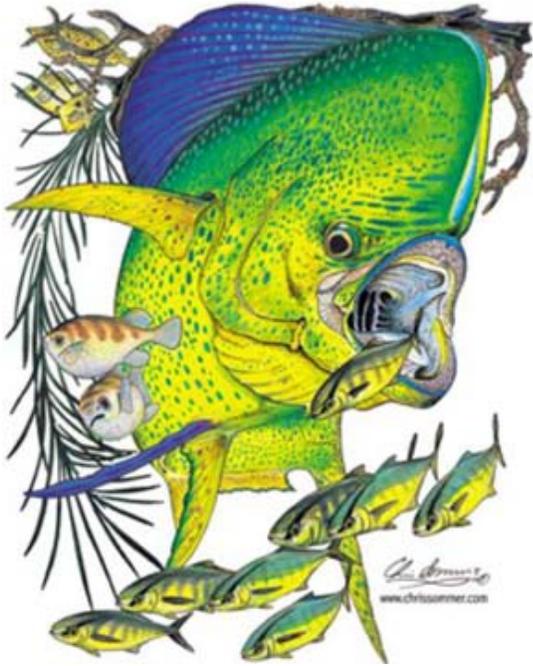


# SC Dolphin Tagging Study

February 2003



## 2002 Progress

The project has met with outstanding public support in its first year with over 350 individuals and 11 sportfishing organizations stepping forward to assist the project. Charter boats, private vessels and individual anglers from Key West, FL to Staten Island, NY volunteered their time and effort to tag dolphin for this study. By the end of the year tagging volunteers numbered 176 in Florida, 2 in Georgia, 137 in South Carolina, 29 in North Carolina, 1 in Virginia and 2 in New York. A volunteer was even registered in Puerto Rico. Unfortunately only 67 of the 350 volunteers signed up were able to tag a dolphin in 2002. Many of the fishermen were registered after the peak dolphin season. Now equipped, they will be ready for the start of the 2003 season. However, 34 anglers, 7 captains and 9 anglers reporting recoveries did manage to qualify for a project tee shirt.

Anglers tagged 378 dolphin during 2002 primarily off Florida and South Carolina with an additional 83 marked and released by biologists. The tagging was distributed over a wide segment of the east coast with 115 released in the Straits of Florida, 32 off south FL, 81 off central FL, 8 off north FL and Georgia, 221 off southern SC, and 3 off northern SC and southern NC. Nine of these fish were reported recaptured as of January 1, 2003. All of the fish showed movement to the northeast traveling at an average speed of 6 nautical miles per day. Three fish were recovered off Oregon and Hatteras Inlets with others reported off Virginia and Rhode Island.

The fish were at liberty an average of 42 days traveling 258 nautical miles (straight line distance) during the period.

Eight vessels were successful in having tagged fish recovered. The Florida based vessels, "*Xcess*" owned by Dwight Hall of Melbourne, "*Fish Trap*" owned by Capt. Scott Goodwin of Cocoa and "*Partner*" owned by Kerry Kahl of Lake Worth each saw one fish recovered. South Carolina boats that were successful in generating recoveries were "*Emotional Rescue*" owned by Jim Moore of Mt. Pleasant, "*Petrel IV*" owned by Harry Johnson Jr. of Sullivan's Island, "*Mac Attack*" owned by Brian McCoy of Hollywood, "*In 2 Deep*" owned by Kevin O'neile of James Island and "*2 By C*" owned by Jim Tharp of Columbia.

## And The Winners Are!

Twelve boats and five anglers were able to tag ten or more fish during 2002. Chester Kalb II's un-named outboard based in Key West topped the private boat field by marking and releasing 53 dolphin. Chester also tagged the most fish as an individual angler, 33, but due to the limitation of one top award per individual or vessel, Bill Baugh of Ramrod Key, FL and Savannah, GA is recognized as the top angler with 16 fish tagged. Through a late season effort, Mark Wilson's vessel, "*Docked Wages*" out of Rockledge, FL was able to capture the charter boat category by tagging 21 dolphin. Each of these individuals received a Penn International 50 on a Star D50/100HC standup rod.

**Check out the Dolphin Tagging Web Site!**

<http://dolphintagging.homestead.com>

## Two Areas Identified as Priority for 2003

Information gathered during the 2002 work has drawn attention to two very divergent areas. Preliminary information indicates that the Mid-Atlantic Bight from Hatteras to Cape Cod may serve as summering grounds for east coast dolphin. The dolphin's summering grounds have never been defined for the east coast. Late summer tagging in this area will aid in defining their occurrence in the area as well assisting the tracking of their fall movements away from the area.

**SC Dolphin Tagging Study**

February 2003

Page 2

The second area of interest lies to the south off the eastern side of the Bahamas Islands from San Salvador up to the Abacos. Anecdotal reports from fishermen indicate a significant size/age segregation of the springtime dolphin stock between this area and south Florida. Anglers off south Florida catch primarily small fish, 10 pounds or less while at the same time fishermen off the eastern Bahamas report virtually only big fish, 20 pounds up. Anglers out of the Carolinas catch significantly larger dolphin (over 30 pounds) than do south and central Florida anglers. While indications are that the eastern Bahamas are supplying these big fish, there is no documented evidence. This project hopes to begin addressing the importance of these two areas in the life of east coast dolphin during 2003.

### **Do You Know Where Your Tag Kit is?**

The 2003 fishing season is fast approaching. The number of dolphin tagged in 2002 fell short of the project's goal. However, the 2003 season will start with 320 additional fishermen equipped to tag fish for the study. If 67 tag kit recipients were able to mark 378 dolphin in 2002, then the current 387 registered anglers should be able to reach the 2,000 fish target set for the 2003 season.

Many fisheries biologists and scientist are skeptical of the value that recreational anglers can contribute to a tagging study. This project has already generated the best single-year tracking of east coast dolphin movements documented. However, this is far from reaching the goal of mapping their fall movements. This is a great opportunity for the fishermen who have registered to tag fish to show a true commitment to conservation and support for fisheries management. You can help make this study a success by following through on your commitment to tag dolphin and provide accurate, detailed information.

### **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 page. Digital images are preferred but color slides or prints will 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.



Photo Courtesy of Joel Arrington

### **Note of Appreciation**

The SC Department of Natural Resources wishes to extend a note of thanks to the following businesses for generously donating the rods and reels being given away as incentives for fishermen to tag their small dolphin in 2002.

#### **Barton and Burwell Fishing Supplies**

47 S. Windemere Dr.  
Charleston, SC 29407

#### **Haddrell's Point Tackle & Supplies**

885 Ben Sawyer Blvd.  
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464

#### **Star Rod Company**

P. O. Box 608  
Morehead City, NC 28557

#### **The Reel John's Tackle**

610 Wesley Dr.  
Charleston, SC 29407

For more information on the project, visit <http://dolphintagging.homestead.com> or contact

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