

Dolphinfish Research Program™

Made Possible by made a grant from The Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation

February 2016



By: Don Hammond

Top Taggers for 2015

The Dolphinfish Research Program is very fortunate to have the support *Haddrell's Point Tackle and Supply* of Mt. Pleasant and Charleston, South Carolina, *Big Rock Sports* of Graham, North Carolina, manufacturer of Star Rods and *Costa Del Mar* of Daytona Beach, Florida, who make the year-end awards possible. These leaders in the sports fishing industry recognize the importance of healthy stocks of game fish, essential to maintaining a thriving recreational fishing industry. Their generous donations also add a touch of friendly competition to this important scientific study.



Convert your small dolphin into a \$600 rod and reel outfit. For as few as 20 small dolphin, fishermen can win one of six of these outfits given away by the Dolphinfish Research Program.



Year-end awards are intended to inspire participants to tag more fish than they normally would for the possibility of earning great merchandise. These awards are presented to the top two boats tagging the most dolphin in each of four regions: Mid-Atlantic Bight (north of 35°N latitude off U.S. East Coast), South Atlantic Bight (Key West, Florida, to 35°N latitude on U.S. East Coast), Gulf of Mexico, and the Tropics (Bahamas Islands, and full Caribbean Sea Islands and nations), and to the overall top charter and private boats. Boats must tag a minimum of 20 fish in the region in which they win to qualify.

The top finisher in each region will receive a TLD30 2 speed reel on a Star Handcrafted standup rod, and the overall top charter and private boat will receive a TLD50 2 speed reel on a Star Handcrafted standup rod. Runner-up boats will receive a Costa Del Mar gift package that includes your choice of a pair of their world-famous sunglasses. Each of these awards is valued at \$600 or more, well worth the extra effort to win.

The 2015 overall Top Private Boat award goes to a boat participating in the study for the first time, the *Cool Cat* home ported in Islamorada, Florida, and captained by Ed Kattel for the tagging of 288 dolphin. The winner of the overall Top Charter Boat award is a familiar one, the *Thomas Flyer* homeported in Miami, Florida, and captained by Jimbo and Rick Thomas for tagging 142 dolphin. The crew of the *Thomas Flyer* was the first to tag 2,000 dolphin in the DRP study.

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Even though 56 fish were tagged in the Mid-Atlantic Bight in 2015, only one boat crew qualified to win a year-end award. The *Pair of Docs* homeported in Ocean City, New Jersey, and owned by Chris Jobes, managed to tag 23 dolphin in 2015. This means that each little peanut thrown back with a tag in it was worth \$26 to Capt. Jobes. The commercial fishermen would certainly like to see that kind of pa day.

The South Atlantic Bight saw some serious competition with 13 boat crews qualifying for the year-end awards. First place in this division was well ahead of the rest of the competition. The *Killin Time II* based out of Cudjoe Key, Florida, and owned by Don Gates managed to tag an impressive 220 dolphin. In so doing they also reached the 2,000 mark in the total number of fish that they have tagged. They are the only boat crew tag dolphin in every year of the study and now have tagged more dolphin than any other boat crew participating in the study.

Second place in the South Atlantic Bight was a tight finish with just six fish separating three boat crews. It was Dr. Bill Pomenti's boat, *Scungilli* home ported in Islamorada, Florida, that edged ahead of his two competitors by tagging 76 dolphin. He edged out Capt. Eric Raslich's boat *Reef Raider* based out of Summerland Key, Florida, which had tagged 75 fish. Just six fish back was Gary York's boat *Mag E* based in Vero Beach, Florida, which had tagged 70 fish.



This small dolphin could be worth \$30 in merchandise when tagged and released. Ask yourself is it worth that much to you for the enjoyment of cleaning it and the small portion of meat it would yield?

Similar to the Mid-Atlantic Bight, the Gulf of Mexico saw only 59 dolphin tagged. Out of the 78 boat owners who have signed up to tag dolphin in the GOM, only three

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 The Greenery of Charleston, Daniel Island, SC

Dolphin Tagging in 2015.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	5
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	836
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	532
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	35
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	22
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	25
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	17
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	13
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	1
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		42
11	Gulf of Mexico			59
12	W Central Atlantic			14
13	Caribbean Sea			88
	Total			1689

tagged fish in 2015. Only one of these boat crews tagged enough dolphin to qualify for the year-end awards. It was Bob Felinski's crew aboard his boat *Latitude Adjustment* out of Richmond, Texas, that captured the first-place award by tagging 42. Each of the little 16- to 20-inch dolphin that the *Latitude Adjustment* threw back earned them more than \$14 in merchandise. I don't know any other place where you can get that kind of money for a 16-inch dolphin.

The Tropical division saw an increase in the number of boats tagging fish. There were four boats that tagged in the Bahamas, six in Puerto Rico, three in the Caymans, two in the U.S Virgin Islands, and one each in Antigua, Dominican Republic, and Curacao. A total of 106 dolphin were tagged, but only one boat crew tagged enough dolphin to qualify for year-end awards. The St. Johns, Virgin Islands, based charter boat, *World Class Anglers* captained by Chris Tronquet and Adam Majchrzak managed to tag 44 small dolphin to earn them one of the rod and reel outfits. They earned more than \$13 in merchandise per fish for the ones they tagged and tossed back.

With 2015 being one of the better years in terms of the number of dolphin tagged, it is a shame that fishermen left three marvelous packages of merchandise valued near \$600 from *Costa Del Mar* on the table. A boat out of Pensacola, Florida, needed just four more fish to qualify, while a Cape Cod, Massachusetts, boat needed just five fish, and a boat out of Antigua; was short by only seven fish.

We want to congratulate all of these winners and thank them for playing a major role in this scientific endeavor to understand dolphinfish. We hope they enjoy using their new equipment.

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



Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation Awards Grant

Greg Jacoski, director of operations for the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, has informed the DRP that Dr. Harvey and the Board of Directors for the Foundation have approved a grant for the Dolphinfish Research Program. This grant will help support expanding the effort to get fishermen to tag their small or unwanted dolphin for science as well as continue its work with satellite tags to track their high seas movements around the Sargasso Sea.

Tracking dolphin using pop-off satellite archival tags is an expensive undertaking. First the tags cost \$4,200 each and cost another \$1,000 in satellite time to retrieve the data. On top of this cost is the issue of the fish's survival. Mortality from the tagging event is easily prevented by careful handling, but it is the natural mortality that is the major obstacle. Dolphinfish are eaten by every predator roaming the ocean. They are preyed upon not just by other fish, but by sharks, whales, porpoises, and sea birds. They never outgrow the threat of being eaten. The total annual mortality of dolphin has been calculated to be 99.7 percent. This means that only 0.3 of a percent of all of the dolphin fry hatched each year will live beyond 12 months of age.

The fact is that in most studies of fish using satellite tags most units never make it to the full programmed term. The tags separate from the study subject prematurely. In the case with dolphin, this can occur when a predator with sharp teeth cuts the tether of the tag while it is consuming the study fish. As challenging as the odds are, the information that can be acquired from even short-term monitoring is worth the cost. This is the most cost-effective way to document natural underwater behavior of large fish.

Using these instruments the DRP has documented dolphin commonly engaging in deep diving at night, presumably to feed on the myriad of small animals that rise up from the great depths of the ocean during the night. These dives have been found to exceed 800 feet in depth. A satellite tag funded by the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation became the first such unit to be carried by a dolphinfish for 180 days. This satellite tag showed a U.S. East Coast fish traveling more than 8,100 miles as it circumnavigated the Sargasso Sea on its way to the Caribbean Sea. These amazing facets of the dolphin's life history would be nearly impossible to document by any other method.

Because of the high cost of these instruments and the challenges faced by the fish once tagged, funding is hard to secure. Only the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation understands the importance of long-term tracking data on dolphinfish and has been willing to fund this vital work.

2015-16 Financial Supporters

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It Takes Two Partners for Success

The Dolphinfish Research Program (DRP) has been very successful because it has had two staunch partners that believe in its work and goals. The strength behind the DRP rests with the fishermen who tag fish and report tag recoveries and the financial supporters who provide the needed funding to carry out the work. Without either of these partners, the research effort could not exist.

More than 1,600 boat owners fishing the western north Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea have volunteered to tag dolphin for this study. Interest in this study among fishermen as well as fishery scientists has never been higher. Fishermen recognize that they are the key to learning more about dolphin behavior in the region where they fish. Scientists are realizing the wealth of information contained in the long-term data bases that have been generated on tagged and recovered fish. This data base is available to any fishery scientist actively engaged in research on dolphinfish. Having access to a long-term record on dolphin occurrence can allow many studies to be conducted that otherwise would not be possible.



Mr. Eddie Smith, second from left, owner of Grady-White Boats, is the only corporate-level sponsor to support the Dolphinfish Research Program every year. Their financial support has been vital to the success of this research.

While the interest among fishermen and researchers in learning more about the dolphin's behavior and life history is increasing, it would be moot if the money was not there to pay the operating costs. There were 61 donations made in 2015. Twelve of the contributors accounted for 70 percent of the financial aid received. These are the corporate sponsors and those that donated at least \$1,000. The remaining donors contributed anywhere from \$25 to \$750 generating a total of \$8,300.

I do appreciate every donation regardless of the amount. However, I believe that the average dolphin fisherman is under-represented in supporting this research that is intended to directly benefit them. Considering that fishermen think nothing of spending hundreds if not

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thousands of dollars on each offshore fishing trip, why wouldn't they think that it would be a wise investment in their fishing future to donate \$100 each year to the DRP? After all, if the dolphin were to disappear there would be little left to fish for. Let's say that there are 2,000 boats in the U.S. that regularly fish for dolphin. Donations from each would result in \$200,000 being raised each year for research. Most years the DRP funding level is just 21 percent of this level. With a \$200,000 budget, we would be able to expand our study using satellite tags to the Gulf of Mexico as well as the Caribbean Sea. This could provide a clear understanding of the dolphinfish stock structure in the western North Atlantic Ocean.

What is a healthy stock of dolphin worth to you?



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