

# Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

Made possible by a grant from Marine Ventures Foundation

August 2008



## 2008 Tagging Activity

A decline in tagging activity was expected this year. The question was how big an impact the high fuel prices and slumping economy would have on anglers tagging dolphin. Tagging was also hampered by a scarcity of school dolphin off the Florida Keys and south Florida, zones 2 and 3, during May. The number of dolphin tagged as of 1 August 2008, 919 individuals, is about 32% below the same period in 2006, considered a normal year of tagging for the study. Compared to the record year of 2007, 2008 tagging is down 60%.

History has shown that zones 2, 3 and 6 represent areas where the majority of dolphin are tagged each year. Tagging off the Florida Keys, zone 2, and off South Carolina, zone 6, is down 40% in 2008 from that observed in the same period of 2006. However, tagging off south Florida, zone 3, is actually up 14% over 2006. Tagging in the Bahamas during 2008 was twice what it was in 2006 for the same period but less than half the number marked in 2007.

Only five boats have tagged more than 45 fish so far this year. Currently the top boats are *Summer Girl* (46 fish), out of Charleston, South Carolina, *Got Ta Go* (50 fish), out of Key West, Florida, *Ballyhoo* (54 fish), out of Ramrod Key, Florida, *Irish Wake* (59 fish), out of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and *Thomas Flyer* (176 fish), out of Miami, Florida.

Five anglers have tagged more than 30 dolphin thus far this year. Michelle Heiser of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida (33 fish), Bill Baugh of Ramrod Key, Florida (34 fish), Justin Brown of Pembroke Pines, Florida (41 fish), Rob Harris of Key West, Florida (48 fish), and Mark Mitchell

of Orlando, Florida (56 fish) are currently the leading anglers.

## Dolphin Tagging Progress by Zones, July 31, 2008

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22N	28N	148
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	281
3	South Florida	25N	27N	342
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	30
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	35
6	Southern SC	32N	33N	66
7	N. SC - S. NC	33N	35N	9
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	3
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		2
11	Gulf of Mexico			0
12	W Central Atlantic			0
13	Caribbean Sea			3
	Total			919

While little to no tagging has taken place during 2008 in the Mid-Atlantic Bight or the Gulf of Mexico, tagging has invaded new waters half a world away. Carmine Vastola, an avid offshore angler from the States who is currently working in Tokyo, Japan, has started tagging dolphin in the South China Sea. It is hoped that his efforts will be picked up by other anglers in the area so that a meaningful tagging study can develop.

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## Duke University Graduate Student Partners with Dolphinfish Program



*Ed Farrel, a native of Cape May, New Jersey, and a 2009 candidate for a master's degree at Duke University, will conduct his master's thesis research on data from the Dolphin Tagging Study.*

Thanks to the help of Dr. Thomas McMurray with Marine Ventures Foundation, the Dolphinfish Research Program (DRP) has established a cooperative effort with Duke University to further the research into the life history of the common dolphinfish. The Dolphinfish Research Program will work in cooperation with Dr. Pat Halpin, Director of Geospatial Analysis Program in the Nichols School of the Environment and Earth Sciences of Duke University. Data generated by the tagging and the recovery of tagged dolphinfish will be made available to graduate students to use as the basis of their thesis or dissertation research. This is being done to maximize the value of the research being done by the Dolphinfish Research Program.

Ed Farrell, who is working on his master's in coastal environmental management, will be the first graduate student to utilize the data bases built by the DRP. Growing up in a port town, Ed spent much of his time fishing or working as mate on board charter boats targeting tunas, sharks and billfish in the northeast canyons. His love of fishing inspired his research interests, which are the distribution and ecology of pelagic fish and marine fisheries policy/management.

He is studying the distribution, movements and ecology of the dolphinfish along the East and Gulf coasts of the United States as well as the Caribbean region. He is using tagging data along with satellite remote sensing data to construct a habitat model that can be applied throughout the eastern North Atlantic.

## South Carolina Tournament Supports Dolphin Research



*Committee members for the 2008 Charleston Fifty-Fifty Tournament discuss results of the competition. (Pictured from left Charlie Aimar, Mike Able, Steve Leasure, and Danny Stewart)*

The Charleston Fifty-Fifty Tournament held June 13 and 14, 2008, at Ripley's Light Marina in Charleston, South Carolina, donated its proceeds of \$5,250 to support the Dolphinfish Research Program. The family-oriented competition focuses on dolphin and wahoo but also includes a category for released billfish. Since its inception one of the goals of the event has been to raise money to help finance marine fisheries conservation work.

This year the tournament's board, composed of Steve Leasure, Charlie Aimar, Mike Able, Bruce Wallace, Shannon Seabrook, Danny Stewart and John Thomas, followed Harry Johnson Jr.'s recommendation for the money to go to the Dolphinfish Research Program. The conservation-based tournament has returned a total of \$17,800 to fund research needed to ensure the future of game fish that tournament participants value.

## Canadian Longliner Recaptures Tagged Dolphin

I recognized that the caller had a strong northern accent but was surprised by how northern: Nova Scotia, Canada. The gentleman, Vaughn Nickerson of Clark's Harbour, Nova Scotia, works as a crew member on the Canadian commercial longline vessel the *Vicious Fisher*. Mr. Nickerson, said he was calling to report that he had one of the program's tags that he had removed from a dolphin.

My first reaction was to think that the vessel must have been returning from fishing in southern waters of the North Atlantic but that was not the case. Being a Canada commercial vessel, it is required to carry out its fishing beyond the 200-mile limit of the Exclusive Economic Zone when fishing off the United States. This is where the crew started to fish off New York and proceeded to follow the Gulf Stream eastward in search of fish.

**Most Recent 2008 Financial Supporters**  
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**Donations to the Dolphin Study are**  
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The tagged dolphin was recovered on June 23<sup>rd</sup> at a location 354 miles ESE of Nantucket Island, Massachusetts (N39° 26', W063° 41'). It was recovered in 81 degree water in an area where a series of sea mounts occur. The Nova Scotia fisherman said dolphin were a rare catch for them, but that he had been seeing them more frequently in the past couple of years.

The dolphin had originally been tagged by the crew of the *Tag-n-Stick*, during an extended fishing trip to the Bahamas in May 2008. Charles Cabell of Richmond, Virginia, owner on the North Carolina-based vessel, decided to help the Dolphin Study by tagging their unwanted dolphin while in the Bahamas. This resulted in the crew of the *Tag-n-Stick* marking 20 fish during their trip.

The recovered fish was originally caught by Berry Muller of Mechanicville, Virginia, on May 9, 2008, during a trip off Man of War Cay. The fish was estimated to be 30 inches in fork length at time of tagging.

At liberty for 45 days, the dolphin was recaptured 1,162 miles NE (straight-line distance) from where it had been released. That is a straight-line travel rate of just under 26 miles per day. If the fish traveled west into the Florida current off Cape Canaveral after tagging and then rode the Gulf Stream the entire time, it would have traveled well over 1,400 miles during its journey.

This is the eastern-most recovery of a tagged dolphin off the continental United States and the third most northern recovery of a tagged dolphin. It is the most northern recovery and longest distance for a dolphin tagged off the eastern Bahamas. The straight-line travel for this fish is the second longest recorded for a dolphinfish off the U.S. East Coast.



*A dolphin tagging May 9, 2008, was recovered 45 days later 350 miles SE of Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. This fish traveled between 1,162 miles to more than 1,400 miles depending on the route.*

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## For More Information, Contact

Don Hammond  
Cooperative Science Services, LLC  
961 Anchor Rd., Charleston, SC 29412-4902  
Telephone – FAX (843) 795-7524  
Email [CSSLCC@bellsouth.net](mailto:CSSLCC@bellsouth.net)  
Web site [www.dolphintagging.com](http://www.dolphintagging.com)

