

Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

January 2011



Tagging in 2010, What a Surprise.

With the U.S. economy and job market recovering at such a so slow pace, the level of tagging in 2010 has been astounding. With 1,748 dolphin reported tagged, 2010 became the year with the second-highest number of fish being tagged, surpassing the number tagged in 2005 by 63 fish.

While the areas that normally lead in tagging, Florida Keys and south Florida, continued to lead the tagging activity, anglers in several of the low-activity areas did increase their tagging effort to set new highs for their sections of the coastal waters. The 37 fish tagged in the Gulf of Mexico by Don Gates and his crew aboard the *Killin Time* more than doubled their previous record. Anglers tagging off the Florida coast from Jupiter to Jacksonville exceeded their previous high by more than a dozen fish. Thanks to the efforts of members of the Piedmont Offshore Fishing Club in Greensboro, North Carolina, the region just north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, saw more than six times as many dolphin tagged than in any previous year. Manuel Botello of San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the dedicated fishing team aboard his boat *Missing Angel* led the tagging effort in the western North Atlantic Ocean region to a level more than twice the number tagged in any previous year.

A total of 120 boats from New York to Texas, Puerto Rico, Mexico (East Coast), Bahamas and Antigua, West Indies, tagged dolphin in the western North Atlantic during 2010. More than 216 anglers fishing aboard these vessels donated their fish to be tagged for science. Public involvement did not end there. Another 33 boats and 34 anglers reported the recapture of tagged dolphin.

The study's success in the western North Atlantic has inspired anglers in many areas around the world to

introduce this research program into their area. In 2008 Carmine Vastola introduced the Dolphin Tagging Study into the South China Sea from Hong Kong. Then in 2009 the program initiated a tagging effort in the Mediterranean Sea and saw two recoveries in 2010. In 2010 the tagging study began building a study in the eastern Pacific Ocean off Central America with boats now tagging off Mexico, Panama and Costa Rica.

Dolphin Tagging Progress by Zones, December 31, 2010.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	191
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	570
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	450
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	93
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	77
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	117
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	9
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	75
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	7
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		7
11	Gulf of Mexico			37
12	W Central Atlantic			109
13	Caribbean Sea			6
	Total			1,748

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Year-end Awards Generously provided by



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Top Taggers for 2010

Determination, dedication, and drive are a few of the traits exhibited by the fishermen who win the year-end awards each year. These individuals and crews are instrumental in the success of this program. The individual angler along with the three winning boats accounted for 706 of the dolphin tagged in 2010. That is more than 40 percent of the total fish tagged in 2010. The fish these taggers released produced 11 of the tag recoveries in 2010.

These fishermen admit that while they would still be tagging fish for the study, they do put forth extra effort in hopes of earning one of the rod and reel outfits. This is why the generosity of Mike Able at **Haddrell's Point Tackle** in Charleston, South Carolina, who contributed the TLD 30 reels, and Philip Henry at **Star Rods** in Morehead City, North Carolina, who provided the custom standup rods, are key to the success of this research program. The chance to earn a \$550 rod and reel serves as a strong motivation to many anglers to tag more dolphin.

The 2010 winning individual angler is Philip Brownell of Coconut Creek, Florida, who provided 91 fish for tagging while fishing with his father, Russell, on their boat *Mad Fin*. His closest competition was Don Gates of Conroe, Texas, who caught 62 fish for tagging aboard his boat *Killin Time*. The third-place angler was Allen Lewis of Orlando, Florida, with 52 fish, while the fourth-place angler was Daryl Williams of Chuluota, Florida, who caught 50 fish for tagging. Both of these anglers fished with Don Gates on the *Killin Time*. Irvin O. Baez of Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, who fished on Manuel Botello's boat *Missing Angel* finished fifth, providing 50 fish for tagging.

In the Private Boat Category, it was Don Gates of Conroe, Texas, and the crew aboard his boat *Killin Time* that walked away with the top position, having tagged 181 dolphin. Manuel Botello of San Juan, Puerto Rico, along with the crew of his boat *Missing Angel* finished in second place, tagging 104 fish. Finishing in third place was the *Mad Fin*, owned by Russell Brownell of Coconut Creek, Florida, with 91 fish tagged. Dr. Bill Pomenti of Islamorada, Florida, and the crew aboard his boat *Scungilli* claimed fourth place, having tagged 80 dolphin. Fifth place in the private boat category goes to Dr. Will Cathey of Greensboro, North Carolina, and the crew aboard his boat *Will Power*, having tagged 50 fish.

Capt. Jimbo Thomas's boat the *Thomas Flyer*, based in Miami, Florida, recaptured the title of Top Charter Boat by tagging 330 dolphin. Second-place charter boat was earned by Capt. Bouncer Smith of Miami, Florida, fishing aboard his boat *Bouncer's Dusky*, which tagged 100 fish. An Islamorada, Florida, charter boat, *Hooked Up*, operated by Capt. Zehntner Gay captured the third

position by tagging 39 dolphin. Fourth place among boats for hire went to Capt. Rob Harris's boat *Gotta Go*, based in Key West, Florida, for his crew tagging 26 fish. Capt. Chip Davis's charter boat *Patriot*, based in Seabrook Island, South Carolina, earned fifth place for tagging 20 fish.

The fourth year-end award is for the boat tagging the most dolphin in areas outside of the east coast of Florida. The top award in this category goes to Manuel Botello's boat *Missing Angel*, based in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and its crew for tagging 104 dolphin off this Caribbean Island. Second place was captured by Capt. Jimbo Thomas on his Miami-based charter boat *Thomas Flyer* for tagging 81 fish during its annual visit to the Bahamas. It was Dr. Will Cathey's boat *Will Power* based in Hatteras, North Carolina, that earned the third spot for tagging 50 dolphin off the Tar Heel State. The private boat *Timber*, captained by Bob Frevert of Jupiter, Florida, secured fourth place by tagging 41 fish in the Bahamas. Fifth place went to Don Gates' boat *Killin Time* out of Conroe, Texas, and its crew for tagging 37 dolphin in the Gulf of Mexico.

Dominican Republic Gold

You might say that I got an early Christmas present when I received an email from Luis Guillermo Jimenez of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, reporting a tag recovery on December 12. Capt. Jimenez reported that he recaptured a tagged dolphin off the island's northern coast. Fishing aboard his boat *Doris*, Capt Jimenez recovered the fish 4.5 miles offshore in the Hispaniola Basin from his hometown of Puerto Plata. He reported the fish as 70 cm long (27.5 inches) and weighing 6 kg (13 pounds). This recapture took place just west of where another tagged dolphin, from San Juan, Puerto Rico, was recovered in 2009.

This fish, however, did not start its travel off Puerto Rico. It came from the U.S. East Coast: Miami, Florida, to be specific. Capt. Jimbo Thomas and his brother Rick who operate the *Thomas Flyer* had released the fish estimated at 18 inches on June 3, 2010. This is the first U.S. East Coast fish to be recovered on the north coast of the north central Caribbean Islands.

The fish was at liberty for 186 days, or roughly six months. In such long-term recoveries, the growth of the fish is always of major interest to anglers. Past long-term recoveries have suggested growth rates of 0.5 to 1.0 inches in length per week. Unfortunately in this case the length ascribed to the fish at recapture does not correlate to weight reported. So the actual growth of this fish is left as unknown.

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

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While we do not know the exact distance this fish traveled, one of three generalized routes could represent its travel. The first and shortest would have the fish travel around the northern tip of the Bahamas Bank where it would turn eastward, traveling into the Sargasso Sea before turning south to head for the Dominican Republic. This route would cover 944 miles, requiring the fish to travel at a rate of a mere 5.0 miles per day (mpd). If the fish had traveled to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, before turning east toward the Sargasso Sea, it would have traveled roughly 1,780 miles, requiring a daily speed of 9.5 mpd. The third possibility would have the fish travel to the dolphins' more northern limits off Massachusetts before turning east and ultimately south. This route would require the fish to travel 2,500 miles and average 13.4 mpd. Any of these routes are very plausible. Even the 13.4 mpd rate amounts to just over one-half mile per hour travel rate which is less than the speed of most ocean currents.

We can get a sense of how long it might have taken for this fish to return to U.S. waters by using the 2009 Puerto Rico to Dominican Republic movement as a guide to project the fish's speed. The 2009 recapture indicated the fish averaged 4.3 mpd. Knowing the recovery site is roughly 790 miles from the Florida Keys and rounding the speed up to 5.0 mpd would have the fish arriving off the Florida Keys the third week of May 2011. Under the May arrival scenario, the fish would be somewhere in the range of 14 to 16 months of age when it returned to U.S. waters. If you pushed the travel rate up to 20 mpd, the fish would have arrived in the third week of January 2011. Since dolphins are caught every month of the year off the Keys, either of these speeds could approximate the speed of travel for the fish.

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