

# Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

July 2010



## Tag Recoveries Galore

The 2010 newsletters have reported on seven tag recoveries, but there have been 22 other reported tag recoveries that have not had their stories told. Each of these recovered fish offers important information to science.

### Case of the Hidden Tag

Andy Whitfield was fishing at the Deli off Savannah, Georgia, during an April 29, 2010, trip aboard the private boat *Catitude* out of Edisto Island, South Carolina. During the trip they caught five nice dolphinfish, in the 20-pound class. It was only when back at the dock when the meat had been filleted off the fish and the skin was being removed that the piece of a tag was found. Only 1.75 inches of the tag were recovered. The serial number was intact but there was no indication of to whom the tag belonged. Because the tag had come from a dolphin, Mr. Whitfield called the Dolphin Tagging Study office and was told that it certainly was the program's tag.

The fish had been tagged 540 miles to the south on June 8, 2009, off Marathon, Florida, by the crew of the *Killin Time*, owned by Don Gates. During its 325 days of liberty it had most probably made a fall/winter tropical jaunt to the south and was returning for its second northerly trek along the U.S. East Coast when it was recaptured. Remains of the tag clearly showed that the tag had been pulled hard enough by some person or animal to pop the tag, leaving just a small portion behind. Eventually, the fish's body grew over the tag, leaving no external evidence of a tag. This demonstrates that if the barb of the tag is implanted and properly locked around a spine radiating from the backbone, it will not come out easily.



Removed from a dolphin fillet, the thin, drawn-out tip on the right indicates the tag has been stretched to the point of breaking rather than having been cut or bitten off at skin level.

### Florida Fish off South Carolina

For the first seven years of the study no dolphin tagged off Florida were recovered off South Carolina. Then in 2009 a commercial longliner recovered a Florida fish on the eastern side of the Gulf Stream on the Charleston Bump, followed by a second Florida fish being recovered later in the year in 110 feet of water off Charleston, South Carolina. In 2010, two more Florida fish have shown up off the Palmetto State.

The first fish was the "hidden tag" fish just discussed, which was caught inside the 50-fathom curve on fishing grounds shared with Georgia while the second fish was recovered just inshore of the 100-fathom curve off Charleston. Tagged May 24, 2010, off Islamorada, Florida, by the crew of Capt. Ron Teke's charter boat *Colorado Magic*, the fish was recovered by the crew of Capt. Wesley Morris's boat, the *Major Motion*. The fish had traveled 525 miles north of its release site during its 19 days of liberty. This fish averaged more than 27 miles per day on its northward trek.

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As stated on numerous occasions, the first tag recovery exhibiting a particular movement is interesting, but a second similar recovery begins to hint at a pattern. Now we have three dolphin tagged off southeast Florida that have been recovered on the west side of the Gulf Stream off South Carolina. Because Florida fish have been recovered in two consecutive years but not during the seven years prior, the question arises as to whether the behavior of the Gulf Stream current influences which side of the current the dolphin travel when leaving Florida.

## *Fish on Bahamian Time*

Dolphin tagged in the deep water canyon in the center of the Bahamas Bank, known as the Tongue of the Ocean, have often exhibited the leisurely lifestyle so famous in these islands. Tagged fish have been recovered less than five miles from where they were originally released following liberty periods as long as 37 and even 51 days. During this study, 65 percent of the recoveries of tags deployed in the Bahamas have occurred within Bahamian waters, which is the highest in-zone recovery rate recorded by the study.

Five recoveries of fish tagged in the Tongue this year show that the fish continue to adopt this unhurried life. A fish tagged by Dave Wilson aboard his boat *Knot Yet* was at liberty for ten days when it was recaptured by Jim Furlong fishing aboard the *Sharp Edge* under the buoy where it had been released. Later, four out of eight fish tagged in a school by Jim Furlong aboard Rich Sharp's boat *Sharp Edge* on March 26, 2010 were recovered five days later under the same buoy by Wilson Velvez and the crew of the *ARA Triumph*. Only in the Tongue of the Ocean have dolphin been observed to linger like this.

## *Florida Tag Intercepts*

Six tag recoveries reported in 2010 represent fish tagged off Florida that did not make it beyond the waters off the Florida east coast before being recaptured. In previous years of the study, in-state recoveries of fish tagged off Florida have accounted for 76 percent of all of the recaptures of fish tagged off Florida.

All of these recoveries exhibited northerly movements being recovered from 29 to 182 miles from their original release site. They were at liberty from one to seven days and traveled at speeds ranging of 8 to 30 miles per day. Overall, these fish averaged moving 23 miles to the north each day. Keep in mind that this rate (below one mile per hour) is slow compared to the Gulf Stream current which moves north at four miles per hour or faster.

The remaining tag recoveries involve movements to North Carolina. Several of these Tar Heel recoveries involve rather impressive movements that will be discussed in the next newsletter. Stay tuned.

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

## *Dolphin Tagging Progress by Zones, June 30, 2010.*

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	161
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	254
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	327
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	76
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	67
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	104
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	8
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	20
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		0
11	Gulf of Mexico			0
12	W Central Atlantic			45
13	Caribbean Sea			0
	Total			1,062



*The face of the future of sportfishing. Philip Brownell, a fifteen-year-old from south Florida, who, while fishing with his father, Russell, has tagged 67 dolphin and donated \$50 in support of the research program. Philip exhibits the dedication and involvement that fishermen need to adopt to ensure the future of offshore fishing.*

## **Financial Support Needed**

I need your help to keep this research program going. For the first time, the Dolphinfish Research Program is facing a \$12,000 shortage in funding for the year. This program has already had to decline an opportunity to become involved with a south Florida fishing tournament because of funding shortages.

Every angler who fishes for dolphin, every offshore fishing organization, and every business involved in offshore fishing should ask themselves if they trust their fishery management agencies to be proactive in acquiring information to manage dolphinfish before the stock crashes. If the answer is no, then you should be supporting this study either by tagging fish or providing financial support. Donations do not have to be at the \$500 or \$1,000 level. Contributions of \$50 or \$100 do help. Please consider donating.

Donations are fully tax deductible. Checks should be made out to Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study and mailed to the Dolphin Study at the address shown at the end of the newsletter.

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## Help Requested from Tournaments

Sports fishing clubs and other sponsors of offshore big game tournaments in the Western North Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea are being asked to assist the Dolphinfish Research Program. Sponsors of these events could provide a very valuable service to science by simply recording specific data on each dolphinfish entered into their events.

Tournaments are being asked to measure the fork length for each dolphin that is weighed in for their event and to record the length, weight and sex of the fish. Length-weight data such as this is extremely useful in learning about the life history of the animal and to monitor changes in their condition between areas and from year to year. For example, a drop in the average body weight for all lengths could mean that there is a lower abundance of food. However, it does require large numbers of fish to be measured to get an accurate look at the length versus weight relationship.

If you, your club or tournament would be willing to assist in collecting length-weight data on dolphinfish, please contact Don Hammond by e-mail or telephone using the contact information at the end of this newsletter.

## New 2010 Financial Contributors

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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 [CSSLLC@bellsouth.net](mailto:CSSLLC@bellsouth.net)  
Web site [www.dolphintagging.com](http://www.dolphintagging.com)

