

Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphin Tagging Research Project

June 2006



Satellite Tag Deployed in Straits of Florida

On May 10, at 10:10 AM the crew of the *Rock Boat* from Weston, Florida, became the second fishing team to deploy an archival pop-off satellite tag on a dolphinfish. Captain Richard DeLizza reported that the bull dolphin released off Islamorada, Florida, and estimated to weigh 30 pounds, was in good shape when it swam away with the micro computer in tow.

Captain DeLizza, who also served as angler on the fish, said that the dolphin cooperated reasonably well, swimming quietly by the boat during the 10 minute system's startup required by the monitoring instrument. Built by Microwave Telemetry Inc., the high-tech monitoring device is designed to monitor environmental conditions along with geographical position for up to a year. What makes the instrument worth its \$4,000 price tag is that the device does not have to be recovered to get the information it records. At the end of its recording period, the tag releases from the fish and floats to the surface where it transmits its data via the ARGOS satellite network back to the manufacturer.

One of six tags planned for deployment on dolphinfish this year, the instrument is set to record data for 30 days. During this time, the tag will record depth, temperature and light intensity every 3 to 4 minutes. Plans are for two satellite tags to be deployed in each of three areas: the Florida Straits, off South Carolina and off North Carolina.

How Important is Dolphin

How important is dolphinfish to the offshore troll fishery? According to the national survey on marine recreational fishing, it makes up 55% of the fish caught by bluewater anglers fishing in the South Atlantic Bight (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east coast of Florida).

There are 32 times more dolphin caught than wahoo and over 6 times more dolphin are caught than yellowfin tuna. Dolphin landings are even 2.5 times higher than king mackerel landings in this region. No wonder sports fishermen say dolphin is the salvation of the bluewater fishery.

If dolphin were not out there to be caught, how would it affect your offshore fishing? Charter and private boats alike report that if it were not for dolphin, many trips would have been a total bust.

The Dolphin Tagging Study is conducting a small pilot survey over the next several months to assess the importance of dolphin to the bluewater troll fishery. Small groups of boat owners and captains along the South Atlantic Bight are being asked to maintain a simple trip log on how many of each species of fish that they caught. This information will be used to develop a survey form that project personnel hope will lead to a study throughout the South Atlantic Bight in 2007.

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Sargassum abundance is highly variable month to month.

Information Needed on Sargassum

Little information has been documented on the relationship between the occurrence of dolphin and the presence of Sargassum, a free-floating ocean algae. This algae is widely recognized by fishermen as prime habitat to find dolphin, wahoo, tuna and even billfish lurking around. The 2006/2007 study is asking participating fishermen to provide information on the occurrence of this plant in the areas where dolphin are tagged.

Anglers are being asked to record information on the presence and surface area of Sargassum. Fishermen are asked the following questions.

Is Sargassum present or absent? One piece that is one square foot in size constitutes "present".

If present, quantify the amount by surface area covered. Indicate amount in the present/absent box of the tag card using a letter designation:

A = 1 to 100 sq. ft.

B = 101 to 1,000 sq. ft.

C = more than 1,000 sq. ft.



Sargassum serves as the nursery ground for many species of marine game fish and other animal life.

2006 Study Progressing Well

Dolphin Study Tagging Progress by Zones, June 1, 2006

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22N	28N	8
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	293
3	South Florida	25N	27N	128
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	10
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	0
6	South Carolina	32N	33N	79
7	N. SC - S. NC	33N	35N	2
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	0
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	0
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		0

Anglers fishing on 37 different boats have reported tagging more than 500 dolphin this year. A majority of the tagging is taking place off the Florida Keys and South Florida. These areas have enjoyed one of the best runs of big dolphin seen in twenty years, according to long-time anglers. Small school dolphin are reported to be occurring in larger schools than normal but with fewer schools being found.

South Carolina anglers are enjoying the products of the large, classic eddies forming on the west side of the Gulf Stream. Palmetto State anglers are reporting large number of small schools of 12 to 20 pound dolphin. However, anglers are encountering few schools of the small, peanut dolphin. While fair numbers of big dolphin are being caught, their abundance is below that being seen in southern Florida.

Shimano and Star Rods Return to Sponsor Year-end Awards

Shimano Fishing Tackle and the Don Coffey Company of Olaffe, Kansas, have joined with Star Rods of the Sea Striker Fishing Tackle Company of Morehead City, North Carolina, to once again sponsor the year-end incentive awards. These conservation-minded companies have been major supporters over the years donating top-of-the-line awards for the top dolphin taggers.

This year's awards will feature the Shimano TLD 50 LRS two speed reel on a custom built standup Star Rod. These \$800 outfits will be given to the individual angler, private boat and charter boat tagging the most dolphin during the 2006 calendar year.

Donations to the Dolphin Study are Fully Tax-Deductible

Make checks out to:

HH Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study

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Financial Support Builds

A major financial boost was received in May with a \$10,000 donation from the Charleston Fifty-Fifty Tournament held out of Toler's Cove Marina in Mt. Pleasant, SC. The family-oriented competition focuses on dolphin and wahoo but also includes categories for tuna and king mackerel. 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, Todd Kay and Danny Stewart along with Harry Johnson, Jr., decided the best use of the money was for the Dolphin Study. This donation goes a long way toward insuring the continuance of the research on this important game fish.

With encouragement from the South Carolina Chapter, the North Carolina Coastal Conservation Association has joined in providing financial support for the Dolphin Tagging Study. The two chapters are encouraging other East Coast chapters to donate to this important study.

Sport Fishing magazine highlighted the need for private donations to continue the study in an article in its April 2006 issue. The article reported on the initial results of the work being done with archival satellite tags but also reported the lack of funding from state and federal sources. It stressed that the future of the highly successful study rests on receiving sufficient private donations from sport-fishing interests.

Donors Making the 2006 Study Possible

Georgetown Landing Marina, Georgetown, SC

Harry Johnson, Jr., Mt. Pleasant, SC

Anonymous, Charleston, SC

Hilton Head Reef Foundation, Hilton Head, SC

South Carolina Saltwater Sportfishing Association, Charleston, SC

The Rock Boat Fishing Team, Weston, FL

Bailey Smith, Great Exuma, BA

Bill Baugh, Ramrod Key, FL

James Shannon, Isle of Palms, SC

Central Florida Offshore Anglers, Orlando, FL

Tony Gonzalez, Miami, FL

Greenville Saltwater Sportfishing Club, Greenville, SC

Coastal Conservation Association, South Carolina

Hilton Head Sports Fishing Club, Hilton Head, SC

Beaufort Sport Fishing & Diving Club, Beaufort, SC

Sail Fishing Club, Miami, FL

Thad Johnson, Merritt Island, FL

New Donors Making the 2006 Study Possible

Charleston Fifty-Fifty Tournament, Charleston, SC

Coastal Conservation Association, North Carolina
Raleigh, NC

Shimano Fishing Tackle / Don Coffey Co., Olafsee, KS

Star Rods / Sea Striker Company, Morehead City, NC

Hallprint Pty. Ltd., Victoria Harbor, S. Australia

Ben Mitchell, Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Ed Rodriguez, Sanford, FL

Summitt Investment, LLC, Jupiter, FL



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