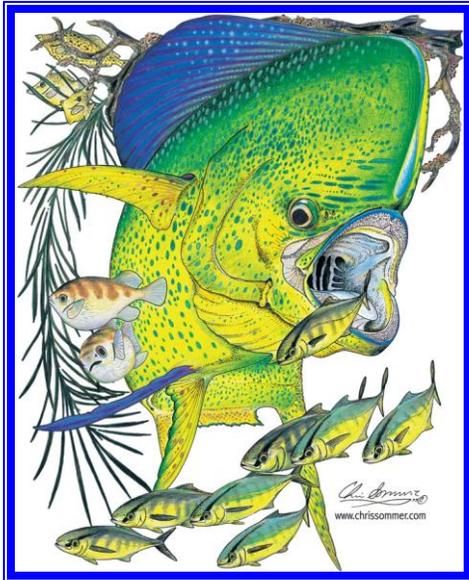


Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

Made possible by a grant from Costa Del Mar

September 2012



2012 Recapture Reports

Ideal tag recovery involves direct and timely communication with the anglers or boat captains tagging and recovering the fish. It requires these individuals to record the important information (date, latitude & longitude, length of the fish) along with their own contact information to allow for follow-up questions. This provides the best opportunity to maximize the information gained from each recapture. Unfortunately this does not always happen, which leaves this biologist very frustrated.

Such is the case with the latest series of reported tag recoveries. Six recaptures have been reported since the last newsletter. Each did yield useful information to science regarding their movement, but none provided complete information about both the release and the recapture event.

The first recovery involves a fish tagged on June 8, 2012, off Charleston, South Carolina, by Robbie Hooker of Walterboro, South Carolina, during a fishing trip aboard the *Summer Girl*. This fish was recovered 19 days later off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, by the charter boat *Low Profile*. The recovery report was made by Jim Lyons, who runs a fish-cleaning business at Hatteras Harbor Marina and has reported numerous tag recoveries in the past. As a second party to the recapture, he was only able to gather the basic information as to where the fish was caught but did record a precise length and weight. During its liberty the fish had traveled 307 miles northeast of its release site, averaging 16.2 miles per day. At recapture the fish measured 27 inches and weighed 5.85 pounds. The fish had been estimated at 14 inches

when released, showing why estimated lengths are not used to gauge growth.

The next recovery produced a new record for time-at-liberty for a tagged common dolphinfish. This fish was tagged by Dave Wamer, from Taylors, South Carolina, while fishing on his boat *Wam Jam* off Marathon, Florida, on May 24, 2011.

David Player, a port sampler for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, reported the recovery following a conversation with a commercial fisherman who had recaptured the fish two to six weeks previously and wanted to remain anonymous. The fisherman was only able to provide a rough location off Georgetown, South Carolina, where he caught the fish, that it was caught during the month of June 2012, and that the fish was nice size, probably around 38 inches in length.



A dolphinfish released off Marathon, Florida, in May 2011 was recovered in June 2012 as it was making its second pass along the U.S. Atlantic Coast.

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GRADY-WHITE BOATS



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From this information we learn that the fish was at liberty from 373 to 403 days (previous record was 371 days). For purposes of this study, a recapture date of June 15 was assigned, resulting in a liberty 388 days. From this information, we can estimate that the fish was most likely 15 to 16 months old when recaptured.

While the direct distance between Marathon and Georgetown is about 600 miles, the fish was most probably making its second pass through these waters. Since it was tagged in the spring of the previous year, this fish had already completed one full migration up the East Coast and back down to the Caribbean for the winter. It was on its second trip up the U.S. Atlantic coast, having covered a distance of roughly 4,400 miles if it went by way of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. While the distance may seem astonishing for a fish starting the trip at 14 inches in fork length, it would require the fish to cover only 11.2 miles per day. This is a moderate pace for these open ocean travelers known to be capable of sustained travel of 90 miles per day.

Another one of Capt. Bouncer Smith's fish was involved in the third recovery. Tagged off Miami, Florida, on June 14, 2012, the dolphin was recaptured 34 days later off Jacksonville Beach, Florida, by R. Ogden, of Atlantic Beach, Florida. Ogden measured the fish at 19.25 inches, less than the legal minimum, so he re-released it after removing the tag. The fish had traveled 331 miles northward from its release site, resulting in an average daily travel of 9.7 miles per day. This is only the third tag recovery from the Jacksonville area.

The fourth tag recovery report received also set a program record, that of being the longest time between the fish's recovery and its report: 11 months. In July 2012 Buddy Gaskins, of Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, apparently re-encountered the forgotten tag he had removed from a dolphin he caught in 2011. He did report that it was caught off Oregon Inlet, North Carolina, on August 31 and that it was probably about 26 inches in length. The fish had been tagged by Bill Baugh off Ramrod Key, Florida. Bill, who is normally precise in his record keeping, could not find the card on his boat. Since it has not been received by the DRP, it may have been a victim of the postal service. The one thing we do get from this recapture is another confirming link between the fish off the Florida Keys and those found off the Outer Banks, two areas separated by 900 miles of open water.

A fish tagged off Cudjoe Key, Florida, on June 7, 2012, by the crew of Don Gates' boat the *Killin Time II* was the subject of the fifth recapture. Kevin Beard recaptured the tagged dolphin during a fishing trip off St. Augustine, Florida, on August 3. At liberty for 57 days, the fish had traveled 449 miles north from its release site, moving at an average rate of 7.9 miles per day. The fish measured 18 inches in fork length when angler Darryl Williams released it, so with the eight weeks of growing

time the fish would have been in the 22- to 24-inch range, close to the reported recovery size of 24 to 28 inches.

Dolphin Tagging Progress by Zones, August 24, 2012.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	7
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	293
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	324
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	38
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	4
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	38
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	65
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	0
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	1
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		3
11	Gulf of Mexico			26
12	W Central Atlantic			11
13	Caribbean Sea			30
	Total			840

This tagged dolphin is one of only a very few to be recaptured off St. Augustine and the first dolphin reported to have been hooked through the eye socket at time of release to be recovered. Don and his crew go to extra lengths to minimize harm to their fish during tagging and this recovery shows that it pays off.

The sixth and final recovery reported this period also involved a fish tagged by the crew of the *Killin Time II*, their sixth fish tagged this year to be reported recaptured. Kelley Allen, one of the *Killin Time II*'s crew members, tagged this fish on June 9, 2012, off Cudjoe Key. The dolphin was recovered 785 miles north of its release site by Petey DuBose of Morehead City, North Carolina, during a fishing trip off Beaufort Inlet, North Carolina. During its 23 days at liberty, the fish averaged traveling northward 34.1 miles per day. While this speed of travel is high, there have been three fish this year that traveled at rates in excess of 50 miles per day.

Each of these recoveries provided additional insight into the life and movements of dolphin. Even a late report can still provide important information. If you are sitting on a tag recovery for any research program, report it now. Any information that you can provide will be appreciated by the research program involved.

Tagging Dolphin off North Carolina

I recently had the pleasure of spending two days tagging dolphin out of Hatteras, North Carolina, as the guest of Dr. Will Cathey, fishing on his boat the *Will Power*. On the first day of fishing we found very poorly formed grass lines and managed to tag 13 fish from the three small schools of dolphin we encountered. The second day produced better weed lines but more importantly more float wood debris which yielded more and larger schools of dolphin resulting in 40 more fish

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being tagged. At the end of fishing we wound up with a mess of wahoo, blackfin tuna, and dolphin (those gut hooked) in the box along with 53 dolphin wearing new tags and available to be caught again.



With a little coordinated effort the crew of the Will Power, home ported in Hatteras, North Carolina, tagged 23 dolphin in less than 30 minutes on the way to a two-day total of 53 dolphin tagged.

In past articles I have discuss how anglers along Florida's east coast tag the most dolphin for the program largely because they have better opportunities to catch dolphin. One of the primary reasons why dolphin fishing is so good off Florida's east coast is the close proximity of the Florida Current to shore. North Carolina features the next-closest points of high ground access to deep water and the Gulf Stream. Specifically, the inlets of Beaufort, Hatteras and Oregon offers anglers the shortest run to the 100 fathom curve and even the 1,000 fathom curve of all the places on the East Coast north of Florida. On many days dolphin can be found as close as five miles from the inlets.

Dolphin season typically runs from April to October off the Tar Heel state. In the spring and early summer, schools of 10- to 20-pound dolphin are abundant. By mid-summer the small school dolphin, 14 to 24 inches, begin showing up in schools that can number in the hundreds of fish. These smaller dolphin will continue to be caught into the fall. Past tag recoveries suggest that small dolphin will linger off the North Carolina coast for at least 30 days, whereas off South Carolina they are steadily tracking northward.

After this trip, I know that North Carolina-based boats have the opportunities to tag as many dolphin as the Florida-based boats. They would not have to dedicate a whole day to tagging but could rather interrupt their regular fishing to seize the opportunity to tag when they encounter a school of small dolphin. A short period spent bailing schoolies is enjoyed by all, if for no other reason than the sheer chaos and mayhem that result. Everyone gets a good laugh. North Carolina fishermen need to give

serious consideration to donating a little of their time and a few of their fish to a cause that will benefit them. The question is whether they could beat the Florida boats.

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