

Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphin Tagging Research Project

May 2007



Dolphin Recovered Off Cuba

A dolphin tagged off the southeastern coast of Florida in 2005 has been reported recovered by a fisherman in Cuba. The recovery report suffered a long delay until the angler found a way to get the letter to someone coming to the U.S. to mail it for him. Ultimately the Dolphin Study received the recovery notification just over one year after the fact. Had the tag been one of the new CSS tags that carry the Web site address, it is likely that it would have been reported sooner. This does show the angler's determination to help science by reporting the recapture.

The dolphin started its odyssey for science off Islamorada, Florida, in late July 2005 when it was caught and tagged by Justin and Don Brown of Pembroke Pines, Florida. The fish measured 16 inches fork length at release.

Senor Juan Ramon Carralero Pineda of Gibara, Holquin, Cuba, recaptured the fish in April 2006 during a fishing trip off Bahia de Gibara located on the northeastern coast of Cuba bordering the Old Bahamas Channel. The fish was at liberty for 252 days and was reported to measure 49 inches fork length when caught.

The stats on this fish are very interesting. Consider the growth. It was at liberty for 36 weeks (8 1/3 months) and grew at the rate of 0.9 inch per week. The dolphinfish was recovered 377 miles SE of its release site. This distance is a straight line, which would assume the fish swam against all of the prevailing currents to reach this

point. It is doubtful that dolphin would move such long distances against prevailing currents. A possible alternate route would take it north along the south Florida coast to the northern tip of the Bahamas Banks where it could turn east and move back south east of the Bahamas Islands using one of the many Bahamas Banks channels on its travel to Cuba, a distance of 950 miles. The fish may have even traveled to North Carolina before turning back south, resulting in a route covering more than 2,000 miles.

It would have been fantastic to have a pop-off satellite tag on this fish. Then we would know where its wanderings had taken it. This makes a good case for using satellite tags to conduct long term tracking of dolphin found off the U.S. East Coast.

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Marine Ventures Foundation

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Hilton Head Reef Foundation

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Yucatan Tagging Expedition Scheduled

Dr. Thomas McMurray, owner of the 74-foot Viking sport fishing vessel *Makara*, has made his boat and crew available to carry out a dolphin tagging expedition in the Yucatan Strait this year. Scheduled for the first two weeks of June, this research effort will attempt to generate information on whether this 125 mile-wide passage is a major route for dolphinfish moving from the western Caribbean Sea into U.S. waters.

The tagging expedition will focus its efforts off the eastern-most tip of the Yucatan Peninsula at Isla Mujeres, Mexico. The goal of this expedition will be to capture and tag as many dolphinfish as possible in these western Caribbean waters to see if any marked fish are later recovered in U.S. territorial waters. Fish moving through this passage are believed to eventually wind up off both the U.S. Gulf and Atlantic coasts.

While it would be ideal to tag 200 to 300 fish during this trip, this is highly unlikely. Achieving such high numbers normally requires the presence of large schools of small fish to be available for tagging. Unfortunately, local intelligence indicates that the expedition will likely encounter only medium to large, 8 to 25 pounds, fish that rarely form schools of more than a dozen individuals.

These larger fish offer a new set of challenges for the crew when attempting to implant a tag. Few anglers ever consider tagging and releasing dolphin this large. These fish are very strong and develop a real bad attitude about being removed from the water. If these larger fish were simply lifted into the boat, so much physical force would be required to subdue them that either the fish could be seriously injured or the crew could be at risk of injury. This is where the lessons learned during the Exuma Sound tagging cruise will be put into play. This cruise began the process of perfecting the techniques for tagging larger dolphin without removing them from the water. Tagging these large fish in the water was found to be very doable using a special tag applicator and good coordination between the mate and the tagger.

Research expeditions of this nature are expensive undertakings. Because of the expense coupled with the general benefit to multiple states along the U.S. East Coast as well as the Gulf of Mexico, such work is typically funded by government. However, that is not the case in this dolphin research. This important research project is being funded by a grant from Marine Ventures Foundation (MVF) of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. MVF also provides major funding for the Dolphin Tagging Study. This is another demonstration of the importance that U.S. residents place on ensuring that a healthy dolphin stock is available in U.S. waters.

Fishermen interested in following the progress of the Yucatan Tagging Expedition will be able to keep up on the day-to-day activity. A daily progress report is

currently planned to be posted at the Marine Ventures Foundation tagging blog during the first two weeks of June. The daily cruise log can be found at <http://mvftag.blogspot.com/>.

Shimano Reels and Star Rods Continue Their Sponsorships

The 2007 tagging incentive awards for Dolphin Tagging Study will again feature the popular combination of a Shimano TLD 50 LRSA 2 speed on a standup Custom Crafted Star Rod. These awards are made possible through the generosity of Shimano Fishing Tackle and the Don Coffey Company of Olathe, Kansas, and Star Rods and the Sea Striker Fishing Tackle Company of Morehead City, North Carolina.

Four year-end awards will be given out in 2007 as a thank you and also as an enticement for anglers to tag more of their dolphin. A rod and reel will be given for the most dolphin tagged in the calendar year for the following categories: private boat, charter boat, individual angler, and boat tagging the most in areas other than off the Florida east coast. The last award was created to stimulate more tagging in the areas that have seen few dolphin being tagged. Only one annual award can be won by a boat/crew.

These awards have been earned with as few as 20 fish tagged to as many 415 fish tagged. While a majority of the awards have gone to Florida-based boats, boats from throughout the Gulf or South Atlantic Bight could easily out-tag the Florida anglers if they set their minds to it.

Participants in the study can also earn the highly popular program T-shirt. This shirt features an original piece of art depicting a bull dolphin by Chris Sommer of Coral Springs, Florida. Each year anglers who capture 5 or more dolphin that are tagged and boat captains whose vessel tags ten or more dolphin will receive a free tee shirt. Also people who report the recovery of tagged fish receive a T-shirt. These shirts can not be purchased, so when you see someone wearing the Dolphin Tagging Study shirt, you know they participate in the study.

Year End Awards Sponsored By



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Walt Eismann (far left), President of the Central Florida Offshore Anglers along with Terry Winn (second from left), club Vice President, and Jack Reidel (far right) Conservation Chairman, present Don Hammond with a \$5,000 donation to the Dolphin Tagging Study.

Central Florida Offshore Anglers – A Club Supporting Conservation

Each year the CFOA in Orlando, Florida, holds a fund raising event to generate money to support fisheries conservation. This year, the Board offered to use up to \$2,500 of these conservation funds to match donations to the Dolphin Tagging Study from its members. The club members came through with the full \$2,500 amount, allowing the club to make a \$5,000 donation and becoming the first sport fishing club to contribute at the sponsor level.

Fisheries conservation is very important to the 131 families who make up the body of the club. This year the club will also provide financial support to the Florida Coastal Conservation Association, Mote Marine Research Lab, a children's fishing tournament and a joint artificial reef project with the Florida Sport Fishing Association out of Cape Canaveral.

This sport fishing club is a good example of what a sport fishing organization can achieve. They get involved to the point of providing financial support for work they believe is important. More sports fishing organizations should follow the CFOA example.

New 2007 Contributors

**Central Florida Offshore Anglers,
Orlando, FL**

**South Carolina Department of Natural
Resources, Charleston, SC**

Larry K. Hufford, Palm Bay, FL

The Ocean Foundation, Washington, DC

Orlando Delgado, Miami, FL

Jeff Martini, Little River, SC

**Greenville Salt Water Sport Fishing Club,
Greenville, SC**

Your Financial Support Is Needed

The target budget for 2007 is only slightly higher than 2006 at \$56,600. This budget will provide funding to continue the existing tagging study along with expanding the study into new areas.

At this writing slightly less than half of these funds have been received. I hope that you will give positive consideration to donating to the CSS Dolphinfish Research Program to ensure this important work continues in 2007. Donations to the Dolphin Tagging Study are fully tax-deductible, thanks to the help of the Hilton Head Reef Foundation. Contributions should be made out to the Hilton Head Reef Foundation (HHR Foundation/Dolphin Study) and sent to the address below.

2007 Financial Supporters

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Ben Mitchell, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
**Northeast Florida Marlin Association,
St. Augustine, FL**
**Florida Sport Fishing Association,
Cape Canaveral, FL**

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