

Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

Made possible by a grant from Marine Ventures Foundation

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2007 Blows the Doors Off

Many new records were set during 2007 for the Dolphin Tagging Study. Anglers tagged 54% more dolphin in 2007 than in any previous year, marking and releasing 2,460 fish. The top 10 boats in 2007 tagged more fish, 1,900 dolphin, which is higher than the total in any previous year. Even more impressive is that the top five vessels collectively tagged more than 1,500 fish, which is almost as many as were tagged last year total. Recaptures followed a similar pattern. Fishermen reported 72 recoveries of tagged dolphinfish in 2007, surpassing the previous record for number of recaptures reported in a single year by 63%.

More than 290 anglers from 25 states and Canada participated in the program during 2007. These fishermen utilized 149 vessels from Montauk, New York, to Key West, Florida, and throughout the Bahamas to support this study. The research program signed up 77 additional offshore boat-owners to tag fish in 2007. This makes over 1,000 anglers and boat owners who have volunteered to tag dolphin for the study during its six years of operation. These anglers have tagged a total 8,500 dolphinfish with 237 tagged fish being recovered in the research program.

Anglers fishing off Florida's east coast tagged a record of more than 1,400 dolphinfish in 2007. Fishermen from South Carolina contributed the second highest number, 499 in zones 5 and 6. Anglers fishing Bahamian waters got serious in their tagging efforts, marking and releasing 348 dolphin. Thanks to the efforts of Tom McMurray and the crew of the *Makara*, 134 dolphin were tagged in the Caribbean Sea, a first for this study. It is surprising

that anglers in the Bahamas and Caribbean would tag more dolphinfish than anglers fishing off North Carolina.

Tagging in the Mid-Atlantic Bight and Gulf of Mexico remained low. Anglers in Maryland and New Jersey reported good numbers of dolphin being present in 2007 but they were all large, 10 pounds +, and no one was willing to release them. Research biologists in the Gulf of Mexico reported outstanding dolphin abundance in their area, but since there is no limit on them in the Gulf, boats were returning with boxes full of mahi. In the Mid-Atlantic where there are harvest limitations, dolphin are a small component of the offshore troll fishery with few boats ever catching a limit. In the Gulf where dolphin is the top fish harvested in the offshore troll fishery, there are no limits and anglers are compelled to keep all they catch. A major factor in the increased tagging in the Bahamas in 2007 was their strict new limits on troll fish.

Offshore fishermen showed a strong commitment to the study in 2007 with 26 boats tagging 10 or more dolphin while 51 anglers captured and tagged five or more fish to help science. For the first time, the top four boats tagged more than 300 fish each. Charter boats based in Florida and South Carolina became more involved in the program in 2007 with 2 of the top five boats being a for-hire vessel. Ten charter boats tagged a total of 758 fish, which was 31% of the total fish tagged. Several of these vessels are the top booking charter boats in their area, showing that for-hire boats can release fish and not just stay in business but thrive doing it.

Visit the program's Web site www.dolphintagging.com and go to the "Results Page" to view a list of the boats and anglers who participated in 2007 along with the number of dolphin that each tagged.

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2007 Tagging Activity

Number of Dolphin Tagged in 2007 by Zone. As of December 31, 2007				
Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22N	28N	352
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	807
3	South Florida	25N	27N	558
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	60
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	83
6	South Carolina	32N	33N	416
7	Southern NC	33N	35N	18
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	6
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	15
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		0
11	Gulf of Mexico			6
12	W C Atlantic			0
13	Caribbean			139
	Total			2460

Top Taggers for 2007

Many of the boats and captains participating in this research program are very loyal to the study. Seven boats have tagged fish all six years of the study. Another six boats have tagged dolphin five out of the six years while 13 additional boats tagged fish four years. These are the fishermen who find great reward in having one of "their" fish caught at some distant location. These fishermen seize every opportunity to tag dolphin and are willing to stop on a school of dolphin to tag a large number of fish quickly. That is how they become top taggers.

Top Private Boat award was earned by the *Killin Time*, owned by Capt. Don Gates of Conroe, Texas, by tagging 389 dolphin during 2006. Capt. Gates is one of the participants in the Dolphin Tagging Study who have tagged fish every year of the study. Capt. Gates, who moved to Texas in 2007, still makes several trips to the Keys to tag. But he and his crew's most amazing achievement is that 28 of their fish have been recovered.

Repeating as Top Angler is Justin Brown of Pembroke Pines, who captured 321 dolphin for tagging while fishing with his father, Don Brown, on their boat *Draggin Dreams*. These dolphin aficionados are so dedicated as to make offshore trips specifically to tag dolphin. Their tagging efforts resulted in 7 recoveries of their fish in 2007.

Many fishermen have a mind-set that charter boats don't throw back edible fish. But Capt. Jimbo Thomas's boat the *Thomas Flyer* out of Miami clearly shows that is not always the case by tagging 367 dolphin in 2007. For the second year straight Capt. Thomas has earned the Top Charter Boat award and in so doing has set an

example of how charter boats can work with science for better fisheries management.

In an effort to stimulate more tagging in areas outside the east coast of Florida, a new award was introduced in 2006 for the boat tagging the most dolphin. This was done to encourage more tagging by boats fishing areas that don't have as many vessels tagging. The *Makara* out of North Palm Beach, Florida, captained by Steve Unsell with mate Billy Gerlach received this year's award for tagging more than 300 dolphin in the Bahamas and Caribbean Sea.

Shimano and Star Rods Provide Awards

Each 2007 winner in the four tagging categories will receive a Shimano TLD50LRSA 2 Speed reel on a Star Custom Crafted standup rod. These year-end incentive awards are made possible by donations from Shimano Fishing Tackle and the Don Coffey Company and Star Rods of the Sea Striker Company. These two conservation-minded companies have supported this research since its start. They deserve a heart-felt thanks from all offshore anglers for their forward thinking in supporting proactive fisheries research. The Dolphinfish Research Program deeply appreciates these companies for their loyal support.



The new X model pop-off satellite archival tag (right) that will be used in 2008 is roughly half the size of its predecessor and will allow smaller fish to be tagged.

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Tag Recoveries – Test of Tagging Skills

Boats whose tagged fish were recovered in 2007.		
Boat	Home Port	Number
Aggressor	Mt. Pleasant, SC	4
Ballyhoo	Ramrod Key, FL	1
Bouncer's Dusky	Miami, FL	4
Contagious	Edisto Beach, SC	1
Day Maker	Mt. Pleasant, SC	1
Draggin Dreams	Pembroke Pines, FL	7
Fin Loco	Oviedo, FL	1
Hammerhead 2	Hollywood, FL	2
Hungry Bear	Stuart, FL	1
It's a Keeper	Chuluota, FL	1
Killin Time	Conroe, TX	28
Lighting Strike	West Palm Beach, FL	2
Makara	North Palm Beach, FL	4
Market Value	Mt. Pleasant, SC	1
Petrel	Mt. Pleasant, SC	1
Reel Gator	Orlando, FL	2
Shin Dig	Johns Island, SC	1
Snookums	Key Colony Beach, FL	1
Special Lady	Mt. Pleasant, SC	4
Thomas Flyer	Miami, FL	4

For a complete listing of recoveries of 2007 fish go to the "Study Results" page on www.dolphintagging.com.

Dolphin Program Updates Name

To more accurately reflect the expanding and diversifying work in which this research program finds itself involved, the scientific study's name has been changed to Dolphinfish Research Program. The expanding use of smart tags and satellite telemetry to begin defining the species, essential habitat and to document diving behavior is one example of how the Dolphin Study is evolving into additional areas of research to provide needed management information.

Donations Support Dolphin Research

I wish to thank all of the individuals, clubs, organizations and businesses that provided financial support in 2007 to keep this private research endeavor moving forward. The numerous outstanding achievements of the 2007 program clearly speak to the quality of the project and the high level of public support that it receives. Thank you.

Donations to the Dolphin Study are Fully Tax-Deductible
Make checks out to:
HH Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study



Program Brochure Available

The Dolphinfish Tagging Research Program announces the availability of a brochure that highlights the study. Outlining the goals of the study, the brochure seeks to inform fishermen of the many information gaps that exist on dolphinfish and how they can help to answer these questions.

Information is provided on how the program relies on individual fishermen to carry out field work collecting the needed data. It explains how anglers who fish offshore from Texas to Florida to Massachusetts are needed to define the regional variations in behavior and movements.

The brochure highlights many of the study's accomplishments such as the astounding international recoveries from the eastern North Atlantic and Caribbean Sea. It also provides information on ways the cutting edge technology of pop-off satellite archival tags is being used to define the fish's habitat and expose deep diving behavior never before documented.

The brochure is available at no cost to anglers, fishing clubs, and tournaments. People interested in receiving a copy should send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Dolphinfish Research Program address provided at the end of this newsletter. Organizations desiring large numbers of the brochure should contact the program's headquarters by telephone or email.

For More Information, Contact

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