

Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

January 2016



Our New Look

The Dolphinfish Research Program is proud to announce a new look thanks to the internationally renowned artist, Guy Harvey. The *Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation* has followed the Dolphinfish Research Program for many years, featuring its accomplishments in an article in the *Guy Harvey* magazine in 2011. In 2012 the GHOF provided corporate financial support to the program and in 2013, joining with the South Carolina Lottery program, provided a research grant to conduct long-term tracking of dolphin using satellite tags. As a result of this grant, the first dolphin to be tracked for six months was documented circumnavigating the Sargasso Sea.



Most people know Guy Harvey as an internationally acclaimed artist specializing in the field of marine art. The fish he creates are so life-like, they almost leap off the

canvas. His eye for detail has impressed fishery scientist as well as the fishermen. But before he was a successful artist he was a fisheries scientist with a Ph.D. from the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. He is also an accomplished photographer, scuba diver and fisherman.

Dr. Harvey is very much a dedicated fisheries scientist, who not only remains active in research but also provides significant funding in support of needed research by way of the Guy Harvey Research Institute at Nova Southeastern University and with special grants to colleges, universities, and other research programs through the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation. When you purchase Guy Harvey merchandise some of the proceeds go to support marine research. Guy is one of the few great artists who put their own money into marine research and conservation.



The Dolphinfish Research Program is very fortunate to have the support of the *Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation*. An example of his commitment to fisheries research and conservation was his desire to get the fishermen on Grand Cayman involved in the Dolphinfish Research Program. Recognizing that no one knew from whence Cayman dolphin came or went, Dr. Harvey wanted to get local anglers active in an effort to answer these questions by tagging their small and unwanted fish. To do this Dr.

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Harvey hosted a trip to Grand Cayman for the DRP director to speak to the fishermen directly during one of their largest sports fishing tournaments, the Kirk Slam, which focuses on dolphin. In spite of terrible weather and poor fishing, seventeen fishermen were registered to tag fish with 14 dolphin being tagged off the island. These are the first known dolphin to be tagged for science in this region of the Caribbean Sea.

The DRP is proud to sport a new look to its Web site, newsletter and tee shirts. The new logo exhibits the grace, power and beauty of dolphinfish, while highlighting the scientific side with a tag in the fish. I hope that you find the new logo not only pleasing to the eye but exciting for what it represents.

Joining with the Boy Scouts of America

Beginning in 2016, the Dolphinfish Research Program will join with the Boy Scouts of America's Brinton Environmental Center to help teach about fisheries science and fisheries conservation. The center is part of BSA's Florida Sea Base facility. Florida Sea Base offers scouts the opportunity to experience marine adventures such as open sea sailing, snorkeling on coral reefs, scuba diving, inshore fishing as well as offshore big game trolling. In Scouting's tradition of teaching responsible environmental stewardship, camp attendees are introduced to the issues faced in the marine environment and how they can become part of the solution. This program is being made possible through the support of the **Harry Hampton Wildlife Fund** of Columbia, South Carolina.

Under this cooperative program visiting scouts will be introduced to fisheries conservation and ways they can help to preserve healthy stocks of fish by tagging and releasing fish for science, in this case dolphinfish. Using the DRP public tagging program, camp participants will have the opportunity for a hands-on experience in scientific field work. This will likely be their first opportunity to participate in a marine research program and to see how fish are marked for scientific study.

It is a well-known fact that the best way to achieve more conservation-minded and ethical fishermen is to begin educating and engaging them when they are young. This is one of the basic principles of the Boy Scouts of America, and the DRP is proud to be partnering with them to teach today's youth the need to be good stewards of our marine fisheries.

Newest Sponsors for 2015

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Dolphin Tagging Progress, December 20, 2015.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	5
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	835
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	532
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	35
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	22
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	25
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	17
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	13
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	1
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		42
11	Gulf of Mexico			59
12	W Central Atlantic			8
13	Caribbean Sea			62
	Total			1656

2015 Tagging Activity

Fishermen tagged a total of 1,656 dolphin in 2015, making it the fifth-best year for the number of dolphin tagged in this study. A total of 101 privately owned vessels and more than 200 anglers participated in accomplishing this feat. Fish were tagged from Texas to Florida in the Gulf of Mexico, from Curacao to Antigua to Dominican Republic in the Caribbean, and from Key West, Florida, to Cape Cod, Massachusetts, on the U.S. Atlantic Coast. Dolphin were even tagged for the DRP in the Eastern Pacific off Guatemala and Southern California. This is an amazing accomplishment in itself, when you consider what it would cost to field a fleet of boats to replicate this effort.

Because of the variations in physical characteristics of the offshore waters in each area, dolphinfish behave differently in every area. This necessitates tagging fish throughout their range to get a comprehensive understanding of their migratory behavior. The 2015 tagging effort saw a significant expansion in the areas where dolphin were tagged. This is most apparent in and around the Caribbean where dolphin were tagged off the islands of Grand Cayman, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, St. Johns, St. Croix, Antigua, and Curacao. Plus we have just signed up a tagger in Belize, which will be our most western tagging activity in the Caribbean.

We also saw a slight growth in tagging in the Mid-Atlantic Bight. In the northern area of the MAB, zone 10, there has been an average of only ten dolphin tagged each year. That number grew to 42 in 2015, plus the first dolphin tagging north of 40° N latitude took place this

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

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Dolphin were tagged in more areas of the Caribbean Sea during 2015 than ever before.

year off Cape Cod, Massachusetts. If angler reports are any indication, the northern MAB had one of its better years for dolphin. Was this because the fish largely by-passed northern Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, or was it because of warmer ocean waters pushing farther north? Most likely it was the change in ocean waters that were behind both events, but reduced fishing pressure down south had to help.

The change in the migration route of the fish moving past northeastern Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina, suppressed the tagging activity along this segment of the East Coast. These three zones normally provide an average of 296 tagged fish each year but in 2015 only 82 were marked and released. If there is one thing that I have learned, when fishermen cannot catch all the fish they want to eat, they are not going to tag and release fish. Dolphin are a major component of the Gulf of Mexico's blue water fishery, and yet science knows little about their basic movement routes in the GOM. DRP efforts to stimulate interest among anglers fishing the Gulf of Mexico to tag dolphin has resulted in several new anglers volunteering. There are currently 77 GOM fishermen who have volunteered to tag dolphin for science and yet only three boats actually tagged fish in 2015. These boats managed to tag 59 fish, which is above the annual average of 25. Fortunately, the two boats that tagged the majority of the GOM dolphin were in opposite corners of the Gulf, one off Texas and one off Florida. This provides the best opportunity to document if the dolphin travel east, west or both directions in the northern Gulf.

Your donations to the Dolphin Study are Fully Tax-Deductible

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HH Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study

Mail checks to the address below.

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In past years a few of the DRP participants have traveled to the eastern Pacific off Mexico and Central America to fish, carrying their tag kits with them. These anglers have tagged as many as ten fish in a year off Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, and Costa Rica. The DRP has now initiated an effort to establish a tagging study in the eastern Pacific and is actively seeking anglers to volunteer to tag their small or unwanted dolphinfish for science. In 2015 we signed up anglers in California and Guatemala to begin tagging for the official Pacific study.

Once again it was the conservation-minded anglers in south Florida and the Florida Keys that provided the majority of the fish tagged. These anglers accounted for 82 percent, 1,367 fish, of all dolphin tagged in 2015. Anglers in these areas have consistently led in tagging dolphin since the beginning of this study. Many fishermen in other regions say that it is only because they have the longest and most ready access to dolphin. While this does make it easier for the casual fisherman who tags one to ten fish each year to catch dolphin, it is the handful of serious fisherman who are on the water regularly that supply more than 80 percent of the fish tagged, and having seen the number of dolphin caught off North Carolina's Outer Banks, there is no question in my mind that boats fishing the Outer Banks could tag just as many fish if not more. Why isn't there more tagging in the Gulf and off North Carolina? It is because of minimal to no regulations on the species in these areas.

Fishermen continue to amaze me with their interest, support and dedication to this scientific study of the dolphinfish. Because of your support, this study has grown into an international cooperative effort among anglers from many countries that would be extremely hard to replicate. More than 1,250 private vessels and 2,600 anglers have participated during its 14 years of operation.

For More Information, Contact

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2015 Financial Supporters

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Mark & Louise Forsythe, Jupiter, FL



Dolphinfish face a harsh life from the start. From the time they hatch, they face predators ready to eat them. Predation comes from not just marlins and tunas but also porpoises, whales, sharks, sea birds and even other dolphin. These fish never outgrow predation. There is always something ready eat them, no matter how big they are. Being a major component of the food supply for apex predators just adds to the importance of this species.

Merry Christmas

And

Happy New Year