

# SC Dolphin Tagging Study

August - September 2004

## Support needed in Mid-Atlantic Bight and Gulf of Mexico

Offshore fishermen are always seeking more information about the fish they target. The South Carolina Dolphin Tagging Study offers anglers a chance to assist in gathering that information. The study is seeking the help of serious offshore fishermen who make three or more trips each month during the season to fish the waters of the Mid-Atlantic Bight or the Gulf of Mexico. The program is looking for anglers who are conservation-minded and willing to release some of the dolphin they catch to help SC Department of Natural Resources biologists learn important information about this valuable species.

Information on movements of dolphin within the Mid-Atlantic Bight has proven elusive. This has been primarily due to the low number of fish being tagged in this important fishing area. Only 27 dolphin were tagged last year in this area, zones 8, 9 and 10. This year has not been much better with just 14 fish having been tagged and released in this area. With only a one- to two percent recovery rate for tagged dolphin, the area has beaten the odds with the recovery this past May with a fish tagged in 2003 off New Jersey.

However, this recapture gives us information on only one fish's movement. Many recoveries are needed to establish clear patterns of movement for a species. This can only be done by tagging large numbers of fish in an area and having anglers report subsequent recoveries of tagged fish.

The SC Dolphin Tagging Study announced in the last issue of the newsletter its expansion into the Gulf of Mexico. This step was taken due to the apparent complexity of the movement patterns for dolphin found in the Florida Straits. It is not known whether dolphin found in the Straits during the heat of the summer are coming from or going to the Gulf of Mexico. This question can be best answered through the help of fishermen in the Gulf tagging and releasing dolphin.

Offshore anglers interested in tagging dolphin for this study should visit the project's Web site at <http://dolphintagging.homestead.com> to sign up to tag fish. Fishermen can also register by contacting the project leader at the address and telephone number shown at the end of this newsletter.

## Tag Recoveries Pour in During July and August

A high number of tagged fish recoveries poured in during July and August this year. Eleven tag recoveries were reported during these months, for a total of 33 tagged dolphin recovery reports received in 2004. Nine of the recoveries came from North Carolina. Among the recoveries was the first record of a dolphin tagged in Bahamian waters to be recovered in US territorial waters. and a new temporary local residence record for the species.

On a fishing trip out of Bimini Island, Bahamas, on June 12, Bob and Richard DeLizza of Weston, Florida, tagged 26 dolphin about seven miles west of the island. Just 21 days later, Lee Buck of Newport, North Carolina, recovered one of the DeLizzas' tagged fish off Beaufort, North Carolina during



a fishing trip aboard his boat, *Saltwater Redneck*. The fish had traveled over 600 miles, averaging almost 29 miles per day. During the three weeks of liberty, the fish grew 2.5 inches in fork length. This recovery represents the first documented movement of a dolphin from Bahamian waters to the US east coast.

Mike Leatherwood of Charleston, South Carolina got into a school of dolphin on April 24 during a fishing trip aboard his boat *Blue Endeavor* off the coast of Charleston. Leatherwood and his crew tagged and released 12 dolphin that day. A fish tagged by Mike Powers, one of the anglers on board on April 24, was recovered 70 days later. With a time frame of 70 days this recovery represents the third longest liberty period for a dolphin recaptured in 2004. The amazing part is that Dr. John Galberry of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina fishing aboard his boat the *Mo' Better*, recaptured Powers' fish only 18.5 miles northeast of its release site. While it appears that that fish remained in the area for over two months, it really cannot be said for certain whether the fish may have just returned to the area after traveling some distance. More tag recoveries will tell.

A series of three tag recoveries off Oregon Inlet, North Carolina over a five-day period in July could hint at a possible mass migration of south Florida fish into the area. On July 13, two charter boats out of the Oregon Inlet Fishing Center, *Drop-N-Back* (captained by Steve Budd) and *Gal-O-Mine* (captained by Benjie York) recovered tagged dolphin. The fish had been tagged by Bill Baugh off Ramrod Key, Florida on June 10 and June 11. Matt Winchester, the mate aboard *Drop-N-Back*, reported the recovery site as southeast of Oregon Inlet, showing that the fish had traveled 874 miles during its 33 days of liberty. Andrew Aus of Stevensville, Maryland, angler on the fish aboard the *Gal-O-Mine*,

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reported the fish recaptured east of Oregon Inlet, establishing its distance traveled at 865 miles during its 32 days of freedom.

The third recovery came on July 17 by another Oregon Inlet Fishing Center charter boat, *Hooker* (captained by Tom Krauss). Angler Eddie Caba tagged this dolphin on June 20 while fishing with Chester Kalb, III off Key West, Florida. Angler Doug Grossenbaugh of Yorktown, Virginia recovered the fish northeast of Oregon Inlet. The fish had traveled 902 miles in the 27 days since its release. This is the second longest movement by a dolphin in the history of the tagging study (first being 995 miles).

Five tag recoveries clearly show the movement of dolphin from off South Carolina to the waters off North Carolina. Three tagged dolphin were recovered southeast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

The first one was tagged by Mike Able's boat *Addie Mae* on May 19 southeast of Charleston. This fish traveled 292 miles during its 38 days of freedom before being recovered during a fishing trip out of Hatteras, North Carolina by Mike Chapman of Williamsburg, Virginia.

Captain Dewey Hemilright of Wanchese, North Carolina, who operates the commercial fishing vessel *Tar Baby* and also fishes on the charter boat *Dog House*, set a record for the most tag recoveries reported by an individual, with three tag recaptures. On July 21, Hemilright recovered a fish tagged by Clint Shannon 60 days earlier during a fishing trip aboard *Houdini* southeast of Charleston. Then on July 22, Hemilright recovered a dolphin tagged by Rit Ritter's boat *Prowess* 68 days prior while fishing southeast of Charleston. Both of these fish were recovered southeast of Cape Hatteras. Hemilright's third recovery was made aboard the charter boat *Dog House* on August 7 while fishing southeast of Oregon Inlet. The fish had been tagged and released 35 days prior by Dixon Pearce, III of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina on a fishing trip southeast of Charleston with his father aboard *Sea Baby*.

The fifth dolphin tagged off Charleston to be recovered off North Carolina was made June 7 by Aaron Skieber of Southport, North Carolina fishing aboard a commercial vessel out of Beaufort Inlet. Tony Smoak of Charleston had tagged the fish 23 days earlier while fishing aboard his boat *Fishwrapper* east-southeast of Charleston.

Central Florida, zone 4, which has had minimal tagging activity in 2004, recorded the remaining recovery report for the period. Tom Hooker of Stuart, Florida recaptured the tagged dolphin on July 12 off St. Lucie Inlet, 14 miles from the original release site. This was just two days after Van Wichers, also of Stuart, tagged and released the fish while fishing aboard his father's boat *In Pursuit*.

The SC Dolphin Tagging Research Study for 2004 is just two tag recoveries away from equaling the number of tagged fish reported recovered during the first two years of the study combined: 35 fish. The 33 dolphin reported recovered in 2004 brings the total number of tagged dolphin recoveries for the project to 68. These recoveries are providing valuable information about the life and movements of dolphin that

science had never researched before. The project now emphasizes acquiring more data on dolphin in the Mid-Atlantic Bight and the Gulf of Mexico.

## Hurricane Season Impacts Tagging

The active 2004 hurricane season has been devastating on the lives and businesses of fishermen in Florida and throughout the southeastern US. Subsequently, it has had a severe impact on the number of dolphin being tagged.

A good example of the impact that these storms have had can be found in the Florida Keys. Anglers in zone 2, Florida Keys, tagged 120 dolphin in August of 2003, but only 26 fish were reported tagged in zone 2 during August of 2004.

## Tagging Progress By Zone as of August 31.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	E. Bahamas	22N	28N	94
2	FL Straits	23N	25N	488
3	South Florida	25N	27N	101
4	Central Florida	27N	30N	41
5	North FL & GA	30N	32N	74
6	Southern SC	32N	33N	520
7	N. SC - S. NC	33N	35N	14
8	Northern NC	35N	36.5N	10
9	Virginia	36.5N	38N	1
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38N		3
11	Gulf of Mexico			6

For more information on the project, visit <http://dolphintagging.homestead.com> or contact

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