

# SSACN Newsletter - July 2011



Welcome to the latest edition of the SSACN newsletter. This month the focus is on the recent Sharkatag event and some interesting stories from the past month or so.

First of all we would like to highlight a significant political change regarding sharks - in a recent press release by Cabinet Secretary, Lochhead said:

"Protecting vulnerable marine species is crucially important. Some shark, skate and ray populations are critically endangered and already protected from commercial fishing. However, these species need additional protection and so Scotland intends to introduce a new protection order to help stock recovery."

Thanks to the data collected by anglers for over 20 years, we will be able to continue to fish for the various species on a 'catch and release basis'.

This is great news! Everyone who has been involved with SSACN's SSTP and other tagging programmes should be immensely proud.

More Information can be found on page 8.



## Sharkatag 2011

As usual there was a great turn out; over 135 anglers fished from around 52 boats and 20 kayakers out over the weekend!

**A big THANK YOU to all of you.**

The turn out from the sharks wasn't great, but the weekend was still a success; increasing awareness and of course everyone had a great time!

| <u>Sharkatag at a Glance</u> |      |      |        |
|------------------------------|------|------|--------|
| (No of Fish Tagged)          |      |      |        |
|                              | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 * |
| Tope                         | 182  | 98   | 46     |
| Smoothhound                  | 9    | 18   | 49     |
| Spurdog                      | 10   | 11   | 3      |
| Bullhuss                     | 13   | 39   | 23     |
| Ray                          | 6    | 10   | 8      |
| Totals                       | 220  | 176  | 129    |

- correct at time of going to press

## TOPE

The majority of tope caught and tagged over the weekend fell to the Drummole launched boats (34), followed by those from Sandhead (11) and finally the Isle of Whithorn (1). Although a good number of boats launched from Brighthouse Bay this year, unfortunately none caught any tope.

These numbers seem to confirm the decline anglers have reported seeing over the past few years.



Join the 400+ valued supporters on Facebook



by using this shortcut  
<http://on.fb.me/IOI8U8>



Fig 2: Andy with a Smooth hound.

## SMOOTHOUND

Good numbers of smoothhound were captured throughout the event.

Though they too must have preferred the waters around the Isle of Whithorn and Drummore with 117 & 100 being caught and 29 & 17 being tagged in these areas, respectively. Sandhead boats captured 48 but none were tagged and once again the Brighthouse Bay boats had a zero return.

## BULLHUSS

Boats from Isle of Whithorn caught the majority of the Bullhuss (21) with only 1 Bullhuss being tagged by a Drummore boat and 1 boat from Brighthouse Bay.



Fig 1: Andy with a good sized Bullhuss.

## SPURDOG

Low numbers during the event, with all three Spurdog captured and tagged from Drummore boats.

## RAYS

Thornback ray numbers were up on the past few years, however once again no other species of ray was seen.



Fig 3: Billy McCormack with a small Thornback Ray caught during the event

**Ian Burrett, the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network's (SSACN - [www.ssacn.org](http://www.ssacn.org)) Project Director highlights major concerns:**

"Evidence from this and previous years Sharkatag events seem to confirm angler's anecdotal evidence that tope numbers are falling on an annual basis. We do not know whether this is down to overfishing on their wintering grounds, a change in their Northern migration route, or as a result of some other factor.

Although the data shows thornback ray stocks seem to be improving slightly, we are concerned that not one cuckoo, blonde or spotted ray has been caught during any of the Sharkatags. Twenty years ago these species were abundant in the region - more research is needed to find out why these fish are disappearing."



## Strange but true !

**We've had some interesting recapture stories over the past few months.....**

### **A Regular Visitor?**

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011, Trevor Armitage fishing on board a local South West Scotland charter boat recaptured tope tag # **4080**.

Trevor's tope had been originally tagged 10<sup>th</sup> Aug 2010 and previously recaptured on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2011 (after 303 days at liberty).

This male tope is probably returning, (after migrating south), to the same location, each year; with luck on his side, hopefully we'll see him again next year.

Recapturing fish, especially tope provides very valuable information, but it is unusual for the same boat fishing the same mark to recapture one twice.

### **Father and Son 'Tag' team**

In another amazing coincidence; Matthew Burrett recaptured a tope #**7631** on **29/06/2011**. Nothing too unusual there – Matthew has recaptured many a tagged fish.

However, looking at the tag returns showed his father, Ian Burrett, had recaptured the self same fish the day before, just 8 miles away.

“What are the odds of that happening”, said Matthew. “My father has tagged hundreds of tope and I have never caught one of them before – an amazing coincidence!”

### **Can you spare some time to help SSACN ?**

**SSACN are grateful for the continued efforts and support from anglers through tagging and submitting data. To support these efforts, we are always looking to recruit more volunteers for 'back office' activities. If you can spare a few hours here and there, please contact us at [contact@ssacn.org](mailto:contact@ssacn.org)**

### **Sharkatag Regular?**

**A Female Tope, # 3425** – was originally tagged during Sharkatag 2010 by Tim Hutchinson on 19th June 2010.

She must have decided she couldn't miss Sharkatag this year as she was recaptured by William Findlay, on Saturday the 25th June 2011 in the same spot at Luce Bay.

This year she weighed in at 19lbs and 125cm in length compared to last year's 107cm & 12lbs



**Fig 5: William Findlay with a tope, caught earlier in the year**



## A record breaking day

What are the odds of getting two recording breaking smoothies in just 20 minutes? These two did, on-board a local charter boat. - Well done guys!



Fig 6: Steve's smoothie, 10lb 4oz



Fig 7: Guy's smoothie, 15lb 1oz

### **Largest smoothhound ever seen in Scottish waters tagged & released**

In a remarkable 20 minute period, two smoothhound that would have beaten the current Scottish record were tagged and released by Scottish Shark Tagging Programme anglers fishing off the South West coast of Scotland.

Steve from the Silverlure fishing club caught his first ever smoothhound which weighed in at 10lb 4 oz – a fish that would have beaten the current record which stands at 7.5 lbs.

However, just a few minutes later “Fish on” came the cry and Guy Stewart who has spent many hours fishing for the species landed the biggest smoothhound ever seen in Scottish waters weighing a fantastic 15lb 1oz.

An excited Guy said “The water so clear I could tell it was a big fish when it was twenty foot down. This fish was beyond my wildest dreams and nearly double the size of my previous best.

This shows the potential of a relatively new species, perhaps due to increased water temperatures, for South West Scotland,



### **Don't forget Tagathon**

Loch Etive 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011.

See [www.tagsharks.com](http://www.tagsharks.com) for registration and more info.





## A common event - perhaps not !

Trevor Armitage, a consultant from South Shields hospital, caught a 170lb common skate a week or so ago aboard a local charter boat. – a common event ?

Well not quite - remarkably the fish was caught on a Penn 6-12 lb class boat rod in a 4 knot tide just off the Mull of Galloway!

The last time anyone can remember a previous capture in the region was in 1988 aboard a Port Patrick longliner.



Fig 8: Trevor with a 204lber caught earlier this year in Sound of Jurn

Trevor said “Having fished for them for over ten years from near Oban, I knew straight away it was skate.

“We had to go on the drift as I couldn’t bully it with such a light rod. It took 2 hours to get the fish to the side of the boat.

“The skipper held the trace and turned to get the gaffe but the 6/0 tope hook straightened. My son John desperately tried to hang onto to its cheek so we could get a photo but sadly the fish disappeared out of sight.”

Good on you Trevor, that’s some catch! Keep up the great work! I wonder what she was doing there?

Unfortunately she didn’t get tagged this time, but perhaps we’ll see her again in the area! Let us know about any strange encounters [contact@ssacn.org](mailto:contact@ssacn.org)

Trevor has also been awarded his Silver Tagger Cap – Congratulations and we look forward to awarding you the next level.

### Tagging returns 2011 So Far

| Species       | Total New Data | Initial Tags | Recaptures |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Tope          | 139            | 134          | 5          |
| Common Skate  | 217            | 117          | 100        |
| Spurdog       | 39             | 37           | 2          |
| Smoothound    | 19             | 19           | 0          |
| Thornback Ray | 15             | 15           | 0          |
| Bullhuss      | 29             | 27           | 2          |

## How it all came about

In 2005 a Lowestoft fishing company proposed a directed commercial fishery for tope meat and fins.

Scientific advice was, and still is, that tope populations are vulnerable and such a fishery is likely to be unsustainable.

The anticipated commercial tope fishery has not developed but tope are still regularly caught as a by-catch in some commercial fisheries, and it is clear that from time to time directed commercial fisheries for tope have taken place.

A group of sea anglers off the internet forums; determined not to see the stocks diminish as had the spurdog just twenty years before got together and formed "Save Our Sharks" (SOS).

Pressure from SOS, the Sea Angler's Conservation Network (SACN) and the Shark Trust encouraged DEFRA to launch a consultation in July 2006 which resulted in a targeted fishery for tope being stopped.

Recreational sea anglers (RSA) could still fish for tope on a catch and release basis and commercials had a 45 kg a day bycatch.

Wales followed suit just a year later but Scottish Fisheries Minister Finnie refused to follow suit and enact the protection.

At the same time a few groups in Scotland realised that they were duplicating work and decided to join forces and formed the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN).

When we asked Mr Finnie to increase the protection of inshore sharks, we were told to go see "Visit Scotland" as sea anglers

had no right to be meddling in fisheries management.

In a meeting earlier this year with SNH and Marine Scotland, SSACN were informed that tope, spurdog, porbeagle and common skate alongside numerous deepwater sharks were being considered for protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Bill.

This had been tried before but failed because the species were still a commercial product.

Since the last review of the bill, the EU had protected the common skate and set a Zero TAC for spurdog and porbeagle, so a more extensive ban, which could have included sea anglers, was considered highly probable.

SSACN was asked to present the case for sea anglers which we did based on the tagging data gathered over the past two decades and the findings of the Radford economic study.

Using this information we were able to show that the recreational 'shark' fishery contributes around £60 million/yr to the Scottish economy and that anglers can fish for those species without impacting stocks.

The announcement made by the current Fisheries Minister, Richard Lochhead (see Page 1) is testimony to the massive contribution made by all involved to raise the profile of our sport and its fantastic socio-economic benefit.



## Great Days at Sea

### 45 Fish Tagged in a day.

What a great day out at sea for Cliff, Cedric and Matt (opposite). All three earned their Bronze Tagger caps with just one fishing session.

Between them they managed to tag **45 fish** in the waters around Luce Bay, the majority were spurdog and tope, though a bullhuss was tagged too.

Hats off to the guys for the great effort on the day to get them all safely tagged and released back into the water. They didn't even have 15 minutes between any of the captures....No rest for the wicked!



**Fig 9: Cliff, Cedric and Matt with their Bronze Caps awarded at the weekend of 9th July 2011.**

### Fantastic Day for a Handover

A days fishing -- what better way is there to have a handover between the old and new project co-ordinators?

James and I had a great couple of days fishing down in Luce Bay at the start of the week, while discussing the future of the Scottish Shark Tagging Programme.

On the first day we tagged 17 fish, 7 tope and 9 spurdog and 1 bullhuss and on day 2 we went to a quieter spot, but which has produced a few large female tope recently.

James caught the 50lb female (see right) and though we had a few more bites I never managed to get my big female!

We also got the chance to try out the new tagging gun and weight charts which we will soon be making available to everyone.

Together these made tagging at the side of the boat an easy option for many of the fish we caught.



**Fig 10: James with a 50lb female tope.**



**Fig 11: Julie, with a 32lb male tope.**



## What's planned next?

### More data analysis

So, everyone is probably wondering what is planned for the next few months?

As you all know, I was taken on as the new project co-ordinator last month. The main focus for the next couple of months is further analysis of all the collected data.

We will be looking at the data species by species to see if we can identify any specific spatial or time dependent patterns and behaviours - what numbers are moving in and out? is it at set times of the year? etc

Fortunately, we aren't losing James; he'll still be working with SSACN while doing his PhD looking into the DNA and movements of tope, spurdog and skate.

For practical projects, this is going to be a very exciting year.

A year long project in conjunction with Marine Scotland Science to study skate around Crinan using acoustic tags and receivers will commence in October.

It is expected that the study will provide a more in depth view of what the fish are doing whilst at liberty as the data should show the movement patterns of the fish.

Posters and information notices will be distributed to let you know what you should do regarding the acoustic tags.

### Other Future Projects

There are many more projects being discussed in collaboration with SSACN, we will cover these in future newsletters.

We are also looking to expand participation in the SSTP and angling in Scotland, through a volunteer programme to get novices trained and involved in the sport and tagging programme.

If you own a charter boat and would be happy to take a volunteer tagger out with you on selected trips, or if your local angling club would be interested in hosting a tagger training course, please contact me at [julie@ssacn.org](mailto:julie@ssacn.org).

**In closing, it is you who make the difference.**

Your encouragement, support and the data you're collecting is so important and the backbone to everything that's being done!

**Once again, thank you!**

As usual, any errors, omissions or other mistakes are the fault of the editor, please send any queries or contributions for the next newsletter to [contact@ssacn.org](mailto:contact@ssacn.org).

