

## The Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network

www.ssacn.org

### Spurdog Tagging Special

Like many Scottish sharks, spurdog stocks are in trouble. Though they used to be found in huge numbers in Scottish waters they are now severely depleted and exist in limited refuge populations.

Anecdotal evidence from anglers has always suggested certain Scottish lochs may hold some of these populations and would be the obvious choice for some form of marine protected area (MPA) to allow stocks to regenerate.

The Scottish Government and their Marine Directorate whilst demanding more rigorous evidence before taking any action to protect them have never been willing to fund the necessary research.

Therefore in order to gather this evidence SSACN have begun the long process of getting the funding required to undertaking a suitable data collection programme.

This weekends 'tagathon' was the first step in the process and had two objectives – to tag as many fish as possible and to raise the public awareness of the need for the protection of Scottish sharks.

#### And now to say thanks –

**To the anglers** who came from all over the country and covered all their own costs – incredible commitment guys;

**To Ken and Helen** from the UK Shark Tagging Programme who drove from Southampton to add their support;

**To the journalists** from the national and angling press who have given great coverage to the state of the stocks and the lack of political commitment;

**To the staff and management** of Resipole who were kind enough to offer the free use of their slip and car parking facilities.

<http://www.resipole.co.uk>



*“One of the real side benefits of the tagathon was meeting up with old friends and also coming face to face with ‘names’ from the computer forums “*

*“ How do I book for next year “*

*“The commitment of those attending at their own expense for a conservation exercise puts into perspective the level at which anglers hold their sport and their desire to see it continue to produce fish for the future”*



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(The fish, like all the others tagged, was returned to the sea immediately after the photo)

#### Results in brief :

- 58 boat anglers
- 27 shore anglers
- 120 spurdog caught
- 24 spurdog tagged
- 16 boats
- 2 kayaks

Note : any spurdog had to weigh 7lbs or more before it could be tagged.

## Coordinators Log Book - Sat/Sun

*"The first SSACN tagathon can only be considered as a resounding success with all boats and many shore anglers catching and releasing spurdog."*

*"What a pity politicians and fisheries managers couldn't be bothered to make the same effort as those who came along to offer their support"*

*"Why cannot the government see what a tourism opportunity they are missing?"*

The event kicked off on a breezy wet day with a meeting at the Resipole Caravan Park launch site on the Saturday morning.

Anglers received their final briefing and collected their tagging kits from Ken Collins of the UK shark tagging programme.

I was happy to see the guys all line up in the parking area at Resipole ready to launch in an orderly fashion, 11 boats were swiftly launched in a surprisingly easy operation and after a quick photo shoot all skippers proceeded to their marks.

After only a few minutes the reports started coming over the radio that one or two fish had been encountered.

Usually when spurdog fishing it takes a while for them to find the baits and come on the feed. The exact opposite scenario happened for most boats. Within a few minutes of anchoring each boat would catch a fish or two then the bites would dry up.

The radio banter continued to show that although the fish weren't feeding in numbers there was some very nice ones about.

A few lads reported fish at fifteen pounds, then a sixteen closely followed by a 17 lb'er from Stuart Cresswell.

By four o'clock most boats packed in as darkness was falling quickly. Many tales about the one that got away were shared in the Salen Inn that night and all agreed that the first day was a total success.

The same boats put to sea on Sunday and with calm winds expected it looked if plenty of fish would be tagged.

Unfortunately no one told the spurdog who then proceeded to ignore nearly all baits put in front of them.

Only three fish were tagged on the Sunday during the day, but to show the fish were there but not feeding, Billy Finlay aboard his own boat Nemesis, had a short evening session between 5 and 7 pm and tagged four fish !!

For most of you, your B&B, boat and car petrol, food and refreshments etc will have cost you a few hundred pounds each – it shows what a dedicated bunch anglers are.

As this was our first event of this kind I am pleased that many of you felt it had run really smoothly – Denis, Gordon, Davie and myself are pleased you enjoyed it.

My thanks to all

*Ian Burrett*

## Top Fish – A record spurdog – caught and released

*There is no doubt that the fish of the day fell to Richard Stanley, who aboard his own boat Double Trouble, caught a spurdog of over 21lbs - bigger than the current rod caught record – which was quickly tagged and released.*

*This, and a 150lb skate caught by Paul Spooner, are two great examples of the kind of fishing which would be more prevalent in Scotland if stocks were regenerated.*

*Such fish would attract anglers from all over the UK and Europe, and provide a much needed boost to tourism and employment opportunities for many coastal communities.*

*Sea angling offers the 'Best Value' option for many species, especially when they are returned alive.*



## The fight to save the Spurdog Shark

### Overfishing prompts anglers to descend upon lochs in a mass effort to tag critically endangered species

IT IS never going to become a cuddly toy like the panda, and it lacks the big cat mystique of the Siberian tiger. But the predatory spurdog, once one of the eastern Atlantic's most prolific small sharks, is equally threatened with extinction in Scottish waters.

And next weekend, Scottish sea anglers will aim to put the bite on fisheries minister Richard Lochhead when they carry out a voluntary two-day tagging exercise aimed at delivering research evidence to support their plea for the creation of a marine reserve to help the species recover.

More than 60 anglers will take to the waters of Loch Sunart in Lochaber and Loch Etive in Argyllshire in a mass effort to tag what they believe are refuge populations of the shark whose numbers have dropped so low it is now on conservationists' lists of "critically endangered" creatures.

In little over a decade, numbers of the spurdog, which once roamed in "packs" five miles square, have shrunk dramatically to around 5% of their original biomass, due, the conservationists say, to intense overfishing by bottom trawlers and long-liners chiefly from France, Ireland, Norway and the UK.

The Scottish Sea Anglers Conservation Network, a charity and vocal pressure group, has organised the "tagathon" next Saturday and Sunday as the first step in a campaign to win a complete ban on commercial fishing for spurdog, whose meat is popular in the UK as "rock salmon" and sought-after by diners in Germany, Belgium, France and Italy.

Organiser and SSACN project director Ian Burrett said yesterday: "Even though the spurdog is listed as critically endangered' in the northeast Atlantic by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund, Scottish Cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead and the Marine Directorate still require further evidence through field-based research before they are willing to take any action to protect them.

"The only way we can meet their evidential needs is by tagging. Our evidence so far from sea anglers is that although the spurdog is migratory, these lochs hold resident breeding populations."

The SSACN wants the government to designate the lochs as Marine Protected Areas, a new EU-designated habitat, as quickly as possible in order to give the shark a chance to regenerate. European countries have signed up to create a network of MPAs by 2012.

The spurdog is an interesting species whose decline has been exacerbated due to its exceptionally slow growth, late maturity and litters of as few as six young. Females do not start reproduction until their teenage years and gestation lasts nearly 24 months, one of the longest of any animal. But some commercial fishers are known to target pregnant females because of their greater weight.

Ali Hood, conservation director of The Shark Trust, a science-based UK charity, explains: "sharks have a tendency to aggregate in large groups defined by sex and age, so should a commercial vessel come across a pack of females they could have a dramatic effect on the population."

She added: "We have to act to prevent the disappearance of this species from our waters. It needs a recovery plan, and an element of management of that plan may well need to be an outright ban on targeting this species altogether."

The spurdog, or spiny dogfish, which can live to 75 years, grow up to 160cm (over 5ft) and weigh more than 9kg (20lbs), is one of only a few species of sharks whose catch is limited by the EU. North Sea and Norwegian Sea catches have been reduced annually for several years, but the conservationists say landings remain well above scientific advice.

Norway banned fishing and landing of the shark last year, except by boats under 28m. Germany is backing further restrictions but failed to win a two-thirds majority for its proposal at the 2007 conference of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

Steve Bastiman, chairman of SSACN, said: "Fish are unfortunately not visible in the same way as other endangered animals, like the panda. And although sharks do suffer from an image issue, as predators they are a key part of keeping the food chain in balance.

"We cannot stand by while the spurdog, and other threatened species like the skate, disappear from our waters in the same way as the Norwegian pout - once the second most common fish in the Clyde - has done."

Next weekend's results will be collated and analysed by the UK Shark Tagging Programme. Tracking the sharks' movements at sea is the next objective, but the conservationists need to raise £25,000 to pay for tags and satellite time.

A Scottish government spokesman said it recognised the "serious condition" of spurdog stocks. "To this end, we have supported action by the European Commission to prevent directed fisheries on spurdog by all European member states in all waters of the northeast Atlantic, not just Scottish waters. These measures came into force this year. This offers maximum protection for spurdog stocks across the whole of their natural range," he said. ----- END

**Note:: Keep your eyes out - Gordon will shortly be launching a wide-ranging blog "Between the Lines" on Scottish angling and will be reporting on a wide range of conservation and policy issues. We will be announcing its launch on [www.ssacn.org](http://www.ssacn.org)**

## The ongoing SSACN Shark programme

### TAGATHON NEXT STEPS

All the data gathered during the recent tagathon is now being gathered by Gordon Goldie of SSACN to be collated and analyzed by Ken and Helen of the UK Shark Tagging Programme.

Some terrific photos and video were shot during the tagathon and as and when they become available they will be posted to our web site – [www.ssacn.org](http://www.ssacn.org)

Such was the response by all concerned that a similar tagathon is already being planned for next year.

### INTERNATIONAL INTEREST

An interesting development following the publicity given to the tagathon is that we have received inquiries from other European bodies to help them implement a tagathon in their country.

Who knows, perhaps EU politicians will recognize that there are interests other than the commercial sector whose needs should be addressed.

### And now for something completely different !!

Paul Spooner in his kayak releasing a huge common skate

### EXTENDED PROGRAMME

The Oban Marine Officer for the SNH, Dr Jane Dodd, wrote to us recently after seeing a copy of our latest lifeline newsletter which highlighted the tagathon.

Jane is currently working with anglers on skate tagging programmes and though it a good idea to combine ideas and resources.

At the same time, SSACN have been holding discussions with the Scottish fisheries research scientists (FRS) with regarding the co-development of an inshore stock survey of key species of interest to sea anglers.

It now appears we may be able to roll the two projects into one and a meeting between SSACN, FRS, SNH, Glasgow University and Millport Marine Laboratory is expected to take place shortly to determine how to take our plans forward.



### A POLICY FOR SHARKS

At a recent meeting with the Marine Directorate we learnt that they are intending to develop a “Policy on Sharks” which will update existing policies into an overarching document that sets out their position on sharks.

The principle aim of the policy is to find a solution that will, in effect, constitute a ban on directed fisheries for all shark species in Scottish waters by all vessels under Scottish Jurisdiction.

SSACN was given an assurance that it would be involved at all levels of discussion in the formulation of the Policy on Sharks.

This will be one of the topics in a meeting we are having with Cabinet Secretary Lochhead in early December and it is hoped that there will be progress on the Policy before the end of this year.

### FINAL WORDS FROM HELEN

*“ I have always been concerned by the global exploitation of all shark species; I hope to become heavily involved in shark conservation when I graduate next year. Because of this, I hold this project close to my heart. ”*

*My thanks to all – Helen*

## The Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network

Recreational sea angling is a selective, environmentally friendly and low-impact fishing activity; it is the # 1 coastal recreation activity in Scotland and is of great social and economic importance.

SSACN is a Charity registered in Scotland which campaigns and works with all bodies for the continual improvement and regeneration of Scotland’s marine environment with a special focus on those areas of interest to sea anglers.

A registered Scottish charity RegNo. SC039015

To Join SSACN, offer your services or to make donations please write to

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Or visit us at [www.ssacn.org](http://www.ssacn.org)



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