

Game fish program recognizes top taggers for 2011

by Janet Krenn (March 7, 2012) Volunteers in Virginia's Game Fish Tagging Program tagged more than 19,000 fish in 2011, and on February 24, program officials recognized the volunteer anglers who out-competed their colleagues in any of 12 categories, including most tagged fish overall, most recaptured fish, and most tagged fish of a single species. First-place taggers in each category received a plaque, and runners-up received a tackle bucket with fishing gear provided by Bass Pro Shop.

"Throughout the 17-year history of the Tagging Program, there's a lot that we've discovered through tag-and-release fishing," says Susanna Musick, Tagging Program coordinator at VIMS and Virginia Sea Grant Marine Recreation Specialist.

"One exciting thing we learned through the taggers' data was that there seems to have been a large influx of juvenile speckled trout in 2011," she says. During the year, participating anglers tagged more than 12,500 speckled trout and recaptured nearly 900. These results are important because speckled trout have had one of the lowest recapture rates amongst the targeted species in the Tagging Program.

The recapture rate rose from 2.4% in 2010 to to 7% in 2011 and speckled trout became the top-tagged species for the second year in a row. The program provides a mechanism for documenting these year-to-year and seasonal fluctuations through concentrated tagging effort. These results also show the growing popularity of speckled trout as a game fish species.

The Virginia Game Fish Tagging Program has been a cooperative project of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) for more than 17 years.

Supported by funding from Virginia's saltwater license funds and VIMS, the program provides data on migration patterns and habitat utilization of 10 species of recreationally important finfish. By donating their time, the volunteer taggers provide fisheries managers with unique data unavailable elsewhere.

"The Game Fish Tagging Program is only possible because of the anglers who volunteer their time to fish, tag, collect, and report data," Musick said. "We're very lucky to have such an extraordinary group of volunteers who contribute to this important source of recreational fisheries data."



Some of the top taggers of 2011 came to Bass Pro Shop to be recognized for their efforts. Front, L-R: Donnie Smith, Jim Robinson, Carl Stover; Back, L-R: Susanna Musick, Wayne Rowe, Sheldon Arey, Ed Shepherd, and Lewis Gillingham. Photo by William Sweatt/VASG.

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2011 Tagger Award Winners

Most Tagged Fish Overall

Ed Shepherd
Sheldon Arey

Most Tagged Red Drum

Jim Robinson
Captain Ed Lawrence

Most Recaptures

Ed Shepherd
Donnie Smith

Most Tagged Sheepshead

Wayne Rowe
Rob Collins

Most Tagged Black Drum

Jim Robinson
Carl Stover

Most Tagged Spadefish

Carl Stover
Jim Robinson

Most Tagged Black Sea Bass

Ed Shepherd
Rob Collins

Most Tagged Speckled Trout

Ed Shepherd
Sheldon Arey

Most Tagged Cobia

Captain Jorj Head
Brian Watkins

Most Tagged Tautog

Rob Collins
Sam Sellard

Most Tagged Flounder

Ed Shepherd
Captain Mike Handforth

Most Tagged Triggerfish

Rob Collins
Rick Guyot