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Hunting and fishing

Dolphins eat 'em up

By FRANK KEATING

An enraged commercial kingfish troller shot a bottlenose dolphin during our recent stay in Florida, and stirred up a hornets' nest of trouble for himself. Sport fishermen were hardly sympathetic. And it is not unlikely that other commercial fishermen had a few well-chosen words for their confrere for drawing so much attention to their unique problem.

The problem, specifically, is that bottlenose dolphin gather around schools of feeding kingfish, even as do commercial trollers and anglers. The mammal dolphin, we might interject here, is not to be confused with the dolphin fish.

Dolphins traditionally join feeding kingfish to snatch one or two for a meal. Taking the course of least resistance, they sometimes snatch kings already hooked on fishermen's lines. As one may imagine, such a slashing attack on a hooked fish does nothing at all for the fisherman's tackle or his fingers, if he is luckless enough to be hauling in the line when the attack occurs. When a cavorting dolphin engages a fishing line, the fisherman is jolted only slightly less than the hooked king which drew the attack in the first place.

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THE LATE Captain Walter Drobecker of Montauk, who often earned part of his winter keep in Florida, wirelining kingfish, once described the walloping strike from a bottlenose dolphin "like snagging a freight train."

Apparently, most Florida commercial men now use "planers" to carry their short trolling lines down deep among the schooled kingfish which, incidentally, may average five and six pounds but which often range to twice and three times this weight. Walter used a 100-foot length of heavy monel wire with attached jig sometimes fashioned from a short piece of combed manilla line. The wire and jig were activated with a gloved hand while the boat paced other trollers in a tight circle.

"The dolphin never took the jig but, now and again, one would catch you off-balance as you handlined a kingfish. If you were lucky, you'd just lose your length of wire. But sometimes you lost a little skin too," he recalled. "I always worried about losing a finger."

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RICHIE KEENE of the Freeport Charvin Fishing Station and vacationing at Islamorada, who witnessed the recent shooting, said wire line fishing for kings has apparently given away to heavy monofilament and deep-diving planers.

"The boats still troll in a tight circle," he explained of the kingfishing off Lower Matecumbe Key. "And the dolphin or porpoises are usually there with them. You see them as the roll."

Fishing the edge of the reef with his wife, Dottie, and friends, ex-Freeporters but now Florida "natives," George and Jane End, Richie looked up at one point to see this commercial skipper lift a rifle and blast at a rolling dolphin. The four occupants of George's 28-foot skiff, yelled at the man who, angrily lowered the weapon.

"We saw the same guy do the same thing a couple of days earlier," Richie related. "At that time we didn't see the porpoise although we figured he was trying to shoot one. But now there was no doubt."

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ARMED WITH the number and description of the boat, the Ends reported the incident to their marina owner on Lower Matecumbe. The next morning a Florida Conservation Officer arrived for more information. He, then, told the Ends that a Federal wildlife man would take over the investigation since shooting at such mammals is now a federal offense.

"And you know," Richie told us after his interview with the game authorities, "this guy with the gun defeated his own purpose. After he shot the porpoise, the fishing dropped dead. The porpoises left and so did the kings."

Studies now seem to indicate that poisonous PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), discharged as waste in the upper Hudson River are detrimental to the spawning of striped bass. But what about the effect of the poisons on human who eat the bass?

Both matters will be discussed in detail by experts at Wednesday's 8 p.m. meeting of Save Our Stripers, Inc., to be held at the Hicksville VFW Hall 320 S. Broadway (Route 107). John Spagnoli, the Department of Environmental Conservation's top biologist in the PCBs studies, is to fly down from Albany, to present his findings after extensive research in the Hudson River. In addition, Sarah Chasis of the Natural Resources Defense Council will present her views on the long range effect of the chemical.

Fishermen and conservationists are urged to attend the meeting. Rounding out an evening of discussion on environmental problems, John Burns of the L.I. Beach Buggy Association will speak about beach and dune erosion as well as beach buggy owner eithics.

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FRESH WATER Info—"We have rented a bungalow in East Hampton," wrote George Goldstein of Jackson Heights. "can you tell me something about the ponds and lakes on the East End of the Island? I believe some of them have good fishing."

Your best bet is to send a $1 check to the Nassau County Fish and Game Association, P.O. Box 245, Rockville Centre, N.Y. 11570. Ask for the L.I. fresh water map. The map not only spots the Island's lakes and streams, it describes the fishes in each.

A supplement lists some of the fishing regulations that apply to the Island. In addition, the 1976 trout stocking list is also included in the package. Oh, yes, a large, stamped self-addressed envelope is required with the $1 check.

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