

Industry, SMAST survey, tag SNE yellowtail

NEW BEDFORD, MA – From late September through early November, two commercial fishing vessels from Rhode Island carried researchers from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) to survey and tag Southern New England (SNE) yellowtail flounder. The stock is especially important these days to fishermen who work in Southern New England and are constrained by very small annual catch limits.

The two participating boats were the Heather Lynn, captained by Steve Follett, and the Travis & Natalie, captained by Joe Mattera. SMAST's Adam Barkley and Greg DeCelles served as chief scientists.

The survey area stretched from Shinnecock Bay off Long Island, NY to the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area (see page 45) and was broken down into three sub-areas – inside the Nantucket Lightship area, to the west of the Lightship, and south of Block Island to Shinnecock.

All told, the project team made 262 randomly selected survey tows during nine trips – six on the Heather Lynn and three on the Travis & Natalie – with 10 or 11 sampling days per sub-area.

One of the project's primary objectives was to gain a better understanding of whether the



Nantucket Lightship Closed Area was harboring and protecting yellowtail.

But, with a pivotal 2012 stock assessment for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail on the horizon, the survey had a second key objective – to compare the relative density and abundance of the stock with what was there during the last industry-based survey, which took place in 2003-2005

(see CFN August 2004 for background).

SMAST's Steve Cadrin, the principal investigator for the 2011 survey, said, "We're looking for change over time across the area."

Furthermore, the crews on both boats were collecting extensive biological samples and data for potential use in the upcoming assessment.

Prior to leaving on his last survey trip aboard the Heather Lynn in early November, DeCelles said, "We're measuring every yellowtail we catch. We're taking scale samples that can be used for age and growth analyses, and we're looking at sex ratios in a sub-sample of the catch."

SMAST researchers will generate length/frequency information and relative abundance estimates this fall and winter, but scale samples will be sent to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center for analysis.

The center already has a backlog of biological samples for a number of

The 2011 SNE yellowtail survey was concluded in early November aboard Travis & Natalie. From left, Adam Barkley of SMAST, Capt. Joe Mattera, and crewman Jim Taylor.



different stocks waiting to be analyzed, but Cadrin was optimistic that center scientists would give the yellowtail samples high priority in light of the upcoming assessment.

More data, better results

The survey team was keenly focused on the importance of the new assessment, as was the New England Fishery Management Council.

Tom Nies, the council's groundfish plan coordinator and chair of the groundfish plan development team, said Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail was last assessed in 2008, so an updated 2012 assessment will be especially welcome.

"The fishery mainly catches three- and four-year-old fish," he said. "The fish that will be caught in 2012 and 2013 weren't even born when the 2008 assessment came out."

Based on advice from its Scientific and Statistical Committee, the council has adopted a 1,003-metric-ton acceptable biological catch (ABC) for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder for the 2012 groundfish fishing year, but ABCs for 2013 and 2014 will be based on the new assessment.

"We need this assessment so we can set accurate catch levels," Nies explained. "Plus, we need to know how much progress we are making towards rebuilding this stock."



From left, Greg DeCelles of SMAST and Heather Lynn crewman Kevin Jones measure and tag yellowtail.

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SMAST photos

Over 5,000 SNE yellowtail were tagged during this fall's 2011 industry-based survey. Anyone who recaptures a tagged yellowtail should record the location, depth, and date of capture, as well as the length of the fish, and call SMAST's Greg DeCelles at (508) 910-6393 or Adam Barkley at (508) 910-6394.

Below, on Travis & Natalie, Doug Zemeckis of SMAST puts a tagged yellowtail back overboard.



The collective desire for more and better assessment data is what drove SMAST to propose the project in the first place.

DeCelles said, "We're trying to get as much of this 2011 survey information used in the assessment as possible."

Tagging, RAMP

Over the course of the survey, the Heather Lynn and Travis & Natalie caught a total of 9,767 Southern New England yellowtail flounder. Of those, 5,015 were tagged-and-released in a large-scale effort to better understand movement and migration patterns among the fish.

"We're tagging all yellowtail that are in good condition when they come on board," said SMAST's Adam Barkley prior to heading out on the last survey trip with the Travis & Natalie crew.

Survey partners had hoped to tag an even greater number of yellowtail, but some of the tows were mixed with skates and dogfish, which damaged the more delicate yellowtail and made them less likely to survive after being released.

Still, Cadrin was pleased with the tagging numbers.

"More yellowtail have been tagged in Southern New England than ever before," he said.

All project participants strongly encouraged fishermen who recapture a tagged yellowtail to write down the location, depth, and date of capture, as well as the length of the fish, and call the number on the tag to report the finding.

The team also was estimating discard mortality on some of the tows, especially on the Travis & Natalie, by using something called Reflex Action Mortality Predictors (RAMP).

Barkley previously used reflex predictors to estimate discard mortality on Georges Bank yellowtail for his Master's degree thesis and found reflex impairment to be a strong indicator of whether or not a fish would survive after being released.

Seven indicators are used. One, for example, tests whether the fish is resistant to having its mouth forced open. Another

centers on the gag reflex to see how the fish responds to having a probe inserted into its throat.

The process has multiple steps, and calculations are involved, but in short, fish that respond well to the RAMP tests have a significantly higher – and measurable – chance of discard survival, so the testing method can be used as a tool for estimating discard mortality.

This discard mortality information, too, could be helpful in future stock assessments, Barkley added.

Findings, funding

SMAST researchers still had a ways to go to analyze the survey's findings, but based on simple at-sea observations, it was clear that the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area wasn't harboring any great reservoir of yellowtail.

"With the exception of dogfish and skates, it was pretty barren in the Lightship," said DeCelles.

Barkley added, "We saw a few yellowtail in the far eastern portion of the Lightship, but that was it."

However, both boats found good pockets of yellowtail on numerous tows outside the Lightship and beyond.

And, noted Barkley, "We were seeing quite a few winter flounder."

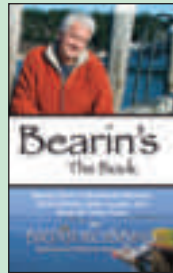
The 2011 survey was funded by the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Institute, which covered the work inside and around Nantucket Lightship, and by the Commercial Fisheries Research

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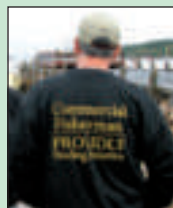
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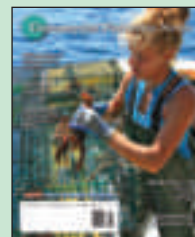


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The inimitable baked beans of yesteryear

Hello. My name is Brian and I like beans.

The tough part is, my tummy doesn't like them as well as I do anymore – but that's OK. It's almost worth the occasional unsettledness.

The tougher part is, I can't make a good batch of beans. Tigger and I have tried, but the results are always lacking something: a little more bite; a little less sweet; a dote more mustard; a skosh of ... *what?* We can't figure it out. Plus, the texture of the beans themselves is never quite right – neither's the juice. And without proper bean juice, what do you have? Nothing, really. Just some small, oval-shaped brown things in a brown liquid. What's the point? You might as well lay on the floor and stare at the ceiling. At least the dog will come and lick your face.

Of course, I wouldn't know what a good bean was if I'd never had them.

But I have, my friends.

I have.

There were Nanny Robbins' beans of my childhood summers. After a hard morning of rowing my dumboldgirlcousin Julia around Green Head Cove aboard the untippable little scow Pa'd built for me, I'd sit down at Nanny and Gramp's table for a lunch of her biscuits with either Franco-

BEARIN'S

by Brian Robbins



American spaghetti or homemade beans. The truth was, anything

would've been good with Nanny's biscuits, but her beans were wicked. I was too little to know anything about the recipe, of course. All I can tell you is they'd come out of that big ol' Clarion stove in an old-fashioned bean pot all thick-juiced, steaming, and good. I'd steel myself with a bowl of them and a bunch of biscuits before heading back out for an afternoon of Julia's big mouth.

Later in life, there were the beans aboard the Pauline, the most beautiful sardine carrier that ever sailed the Maine coast. Between Henry (the skipper) and The Swede (the one-man crew), I believe the latter was in charge of the beans. There were a number of good things to come from a visit aboard the Pauline: the sardines tucked under the locker on the starboard side (Eagle Brand, packed in oil with a single green chili pepper); rum; and The Swede's biscuits (not as good as Nanny's, but the rum offset things). The beans, though, were something else: slow-cooked for

several tides and full of flavors, all sweet/salty/peppery/tangy with the perfect amounts of salt pork and onion. What *were* the perfect amounts of salt pork and onions? I can't tell you. Blame it on being a few decades ago; blame it on the rum; doesn't matter. I can only tell you they were excellent.

There were the three (3) batches of beans I had between 1984 and 1989, one each upon the occasion of the birth of my three children: Jessica, Jeremy, and Cassie. When I would come home from the hospital post-delivery while everyone was resting, there'd be a pot of beans waiting for me, sent over by the kids' grandparents, Granny and Buff. (Well, made by Granny; Buff's not big on cooking, but he gave the project his full support.) It was the only time there were ever beans in the house during those years, as nobody else had any use for them – and I had to make sure to have everything all scrubbed up and sterilized, free of any beanish evidence before mother and baby came home. But for a little bit, I was in hog heaven: a new father *and* consumer of rich and savory beans. Pretty darn good.

There were even the beans from the summer of Cashes Ledge – which were nothing more than hot-rodded B&M beans right out of the can. You'd start by chopping up a bunch of bacon and frying it up in a saucepan, along with an onion or two. (Just about anything good

starts with an onion, except for tapioca pudding.) Drain off most (not all – no need to be a health fanatic about it) of the bacon grease into a can for later use and then dump in a charge of B&Ms. Wind the pepper to it and then go bait some bags while the whole mess gurgled and bubbled for a bit, getting to know itself. The result was a fairly rugged, gooey pot of goodness. Maybe you had to be running in a SSW direction for them to taste that way, but all I know is they laid the foundation for a number of those early offshore lobster trips. (And yes – even trying to replicate those at home since has proven unsuccessful. Not bad, mind you – but just not the same.)

Don't get me wrong: there are plenty of good things to be had from our kitchen these days. (I mean, look at me. Do I appear to be getting enough to eat? Exactly. Case closed.) And that's the thing: between Tigger's ability to gut-hunch recipes and my dumb luck and knack for the occasional happy accident, you'd think we'd be able to pull off a handsome batch of baked beans.

But no.

Chili, yes. It's gotten to the point where we can't wait to get Thanksgiving dinner over and behind us so's we can make up a batch of Holy Crap Chili with the leftover turkey.

But that's different.

My name is Brian and I like beans. ■

Yellowtail survey

Continued from page 25

Foundation (CFRF) in Rhode Island, which supported the additional survey work out to Shinnecock to obtain more data to improve the 2012 stock assessment.

The Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife, which led the 2003-2005 survey effort, lent the 2011 team the original survey nets, which the partners greatly appreciated.

"That saved us a lot of money," said Cadrin.

The current survey team also benefited from the fact that the Heather Lynn took part in both surveys.

Cadrin, DeCelles, and Barkley all

emphasized that the survey wouldn't have been possible without industry's help, and DeCelles and Barkley, who were on board either together or separately for all of the trips, called the "positive working relationship" with both crews "an asset" to the whole project.

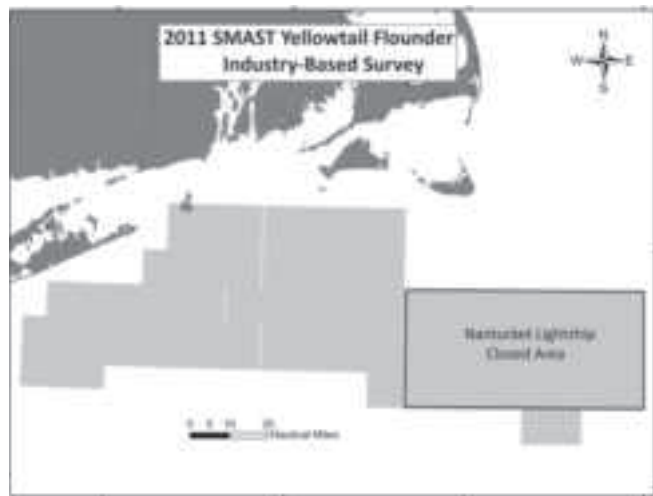
SMAST researchers will be presenting preliminary results from the 2011 survey during a CFRF-hosted informational session on Jan. 24 at the Hampton Inn in South Kingstown beginning at 1:30 pm.

The session will feature updates on other projects as well, including the industry-based survey for winter

flounder, discard mortality work on Southern New England flatfish, and a cooperative research project with industry to characterize and map habitat in Block Island Sound and Rhode Island waters.

For more information, visit the CFRF website at <www.cfrfoundation.org> or call CFRF Administrative Assistant Jane Dickinson at (401) 515-4892.

Janice M. Plante



Location of the 2011 SMAST yellowtail flounder industry-based survey. The study area is shown in gray, and the Nantucket Lightship Closed Area is outlined in black.

SMAST graphic

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