
A Tagging Method for Small Cetaceans

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A TAGGING METHOD FOR SMALL CETACEANS

Although satisfactory methods have been developed for tagging whales, none has been available for porpoises and dolphins. Nishiwaki, Nakajima, and Tobayama (*Sci. Rep. Whales Res. Inst.*, 20, 1966) pointed out that increasing use of these animals for food and increasing scientific interest in their biology make such a marking system desirable. Their attempts at tagging, however, proved fruitless. At the Oceanic Institute (Makapuu Point, Waimanalo, Oahu, Hawaii), an apparently satisfactory method of tagging dorsal fins was developed and tested. Both captive animals and members of wild schools have been tagged with yellow plastic deer ear tags (Nasco, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin).

This tag is applied by punching a cylindrical hole with a cattle ear-punch 2 centimeters within the trailing edge of the dorsal fin near the tip. Then a cylindrical rod the width of the resultant hole, bearing a numbered plaque, is slipped through, and the opposing plaque is forced over the expanded end of the cylinder from the opposite side of the fin (Fig. 1). After these parts have been snapped together, the porpoise carries two numbered tag surfaces parallel to, but not touching, the fin surface (Fig. 2). Numbers or other data can be printed on the surfaces, and the size, color, or shape can be changed to facilitate sightings at sea. Larger tags, constructed of $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch teflon sheeting, have been placed successfully on captive animals. The tag can be placed in a few seconds if the animal is on the deck of a ship or, with the animal properly restrained, might be attached in the water.

The three wild animals were tagged with small tags and released off the lee coast of

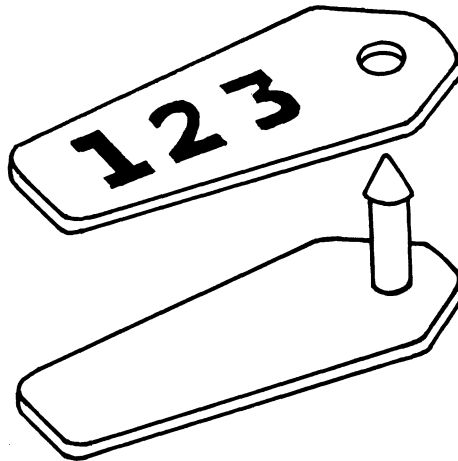


FIG. 1.—Ear tag of deer used on porpoises.



FIG. 2.—Tag on the dorsal fin of a rough-tooth porpoise, *Steno bredanensis*.

Oahu. Two were rough-tooth porpoises (*Steno bredanensis*) and one was an adult male, Hawaiian spotted or “kiko” porpoise (*Stenella attenuata*). The latter was caught from a school of about 200 animals that we consider resident in the area, judging from numerous sightings of the school and certain individuals that we recognized by pattern and scarring. The male was caught and tagged 2.5 mi. S Makua Valley on 1 August 1965. On 2 September 1967, at almost the identical locality, the tagged individual swam repeatedly to the windows of the MOC (Mobile Observation Chamber) when one of us (Norris) was observing porpoise behavior in the same school. The tag was intact and appeared to be in perfect condition. The numerals of the tag plates were covered with a thin film of algae. The tagged animal was seen again several times in 1968. The latest sighting was in mid-December 1968, about 3½ years after placement of the tag.

Thus far, tags placed on captive animals have remained in position (except for one that was removed after about 15 months). As there is no movement of the shaft piercing the fin or little hydrodynamically-induced strain because of the loose movement of the numbered plates, wounds seem to heal around the tag shaft.

This paper is Oceanic Institute contribution no. 37.—KENNETH S. NORRIS AND KAREN W. PRYOR, *Oceanic Institute, Makapuu Oceanic Center, Waimanalo, Oahu, Hawaii, 96795. Accepted 10 April 1970.*