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SPOONS IN SHALLOW (P. 44)

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THE MAGAZINE OF SALTWATER

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TROPHY DOLPHIN

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Cobia Exhibit Explosive Growth

WHILE DOLPHIN (MAHD) AND TUNA ARE KNOWN TO put on pounds furiously during their relatively short lives, continuing work in aquaculture suggests that cobia may be the boss of bulking up. "Cobia growth rates ... are among the fastest ever recorded for teleosts [bony fish, versus sharks/rays]," according to a recent study in the journal *World Aquaculture*, was.org.

The March report "Can Offshore Aquaculture of Carnivorous Fish be Sustainable?" by Daniel Benetti et al., calls the species' growth "extraordinary."



Pen-raising cobia provides great opportunities to monitor their growth (above); these large fish (below) in Snapperfarm's Puerto Rico offshore pens generally topped 10 pounds in just their first year.



The authors point out that well-fed cobia reached 9 to 13 pounds in their first year. That compares with mutton snapper, another species being investigated for aquaculture potential, which grew to about a pound in their first year — a growth rate typical of most saltwater fish, for example, grouper, snook and flounder.

The report also concludes that in ocean waters with sufficient depths and current, aquaculture of cobia promises "high yields of seafood for human consumption with low environmental impact." At the same time, the authors cite a need to reduce or eliminate the use of fish meal in aquaculture feed, suggesting grain-based alternatives be developed.

SURVEY DATA: GUATEMALA HAS NO PEER FOR SAILFISH ACTION

Your best bet for billfish action in the Pacific? No contest: Data in the 2005 *Billfish Newsletter*, released earlier this year, show Guatemala to be the hands-down champ in 2005 when comparing catch per unit of effort in 2004. It provides on average not quite six billfish (mostly sailfish) per day for each angler (down slightly from the seven-per-day average of 2005). Panama and Costa Rica, the only other countries with an average daily CPUE exceeding two fish in 2004, came in at 2.5 and 2.25, respectively. Those numbers dropped considerably from levels in 2003, when they were 5.9 and 4.9.

Hawaii experienced the greatest number of angler days of any destination, registering about 2,400 — down from 3,300 in 2003. The fishery enjoyed its second-highest CPUE for blue marlin (0.2 per angler per day) since 1997, while the CPUE of 0.16 for striped marlin off Southern California was the highest since 1996. On the other hand, the black marlin fishery off Panama continued at the historically low pace of the preceding four years.

The report is issued annually by the NMFS/Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, California; you can see the entire report online at http://swfsc.nmfs.noaa.gov/fish_res.htm.

TALK OF NEW STRIPED BASS HARVEST CREATES ANXIETY

Federal fishery managers were considering at press time lifting the 15-year moratorium on the harvest of striped bass in federal waters. The possibility created waves of anxiety among recreational-fishing interests who fear that any commercial harvest would threaten the multibillion-dollar striped bass sport fishery that has



ANDY HARRIS

Central America tops the angler-success list for sailfish like this one hooked off Guatemala.