



# do your part.



Researchers:  
USM - The University of Southern Mississippi,  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, Center for  
Fisheries Research and Development

Funding Agencies:  
DMR - Mississippi Department of  
Marine Resources  
SFR - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,  
Sport Fish Restoration Program

<b>SPOTTED SEATROUT TAGGING DATA CARD</b> <small>(PLEASE PRINT)</small>		TAG NUMBER <b>ST 17825</b>
TAGGING DATE: <small>MO/DAY/YR</small>	LOCATION OF RELEASE	
FISH CONDITION AT RELEASE GOOD ___ FAIR ___ POOR ___	TOTAL LENGTH ___ INCHES	<input type="checkbox"/> MEASURED <input type="checkbox"/> ESTIMATED
ANGLER:	COMMENTS:	
STREET ADDRESS OR P.O. BOX		
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE		
<b>SPOTTED SEATROUT PROJECT - GULF COAST RESEARCH LABORATORY</b> <small>P.O. BOX 7000, OCEAN SPRINGS, MS 39566</small>		

waters, tripletail are found in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

As a sport fish, they are sought after by anglers throwing small flies, artificial lures and live shrimp while observing them nonchalantly floating just under the surface. Tripletail are great at playing hide-and-seek and fishermen often succumb to their quick disappearing acts. The Gulf Coast Research Lab is encouraging more anglers, especially those along the lower Gulf coast, to participate in the Tripletail Tag & Release Program, as every fish tagged provides a wealth of data which helps us understand and conserve our resource.

To request a free tagging kit or for more info on the Tripletail Tagging Program, call the Gulf Coast Research Lab at 228.872.4202, Or write:  
Read Hendon  
Center for Fisheries  
Research & Development  
Gulf Coast research Laboratory  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
P.O. Box 7000  
Ocean Springs, MS 39566-7000

## An example of a tagging data card in which anglers record information on their catch.

along the Florida coast. The size range of the tagged fish ranged from 8.0" to 29" in total length and more than 50% were between 12" and 17".

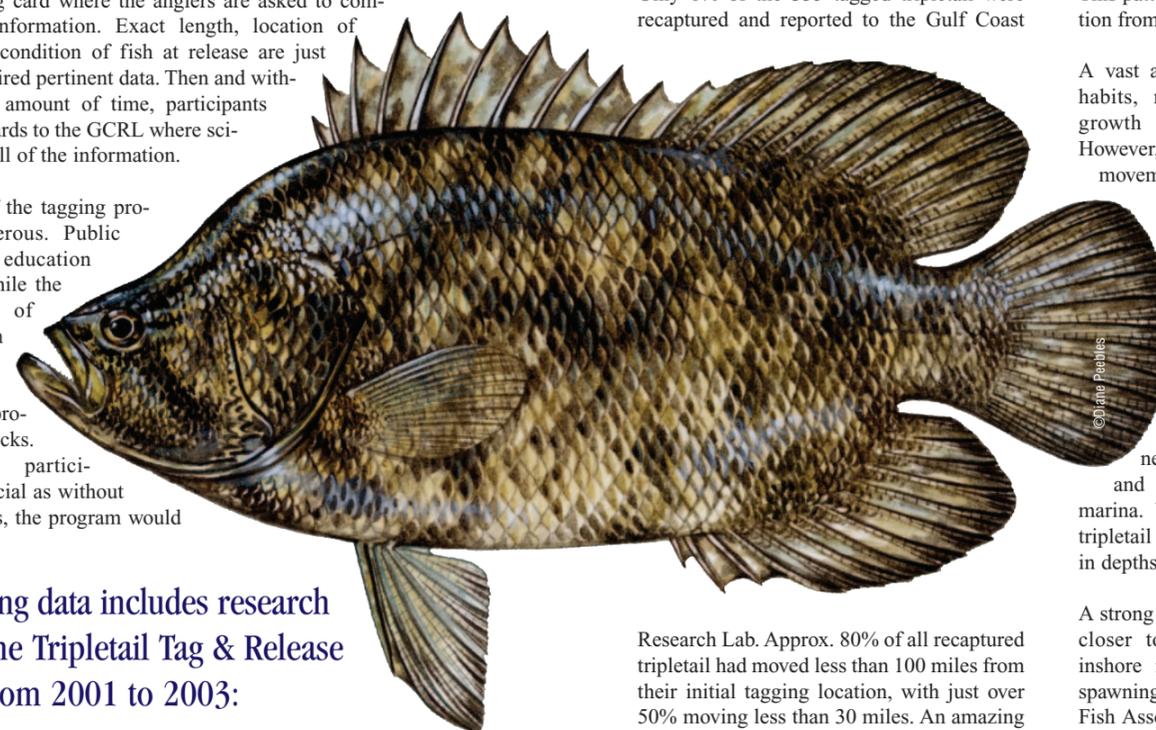
Only 6% of the 335 tagged tripletail were recaptured and reported to the Gulf Coast

Worthy of mention is comparisons have been linked between tripletail and cobia, *Rachycentron canadum*. Based on tripletail initial recapture data, most of the fish tagged in the winter were recaptured in early spring. This pattern is indicative of the cobia migration from South Florida to the northern Gulf.

A vast amount of information on feeding habits, reproductive characteristics, and growth of tripletail has been amassed. However, there is no scientific data on the movements and migratory habits in the Gulf. Spawning occurs during the spring and summer months in which they are often found floating near the surface, lying alongside buoys and channel markers or drifting near other floating objects. In the Flamingo area, I have even seen them floating horizontally or vertically inside small creeks, near the edges flats, shallow channels and at times, reasonably close to the marina. Yet, I have experienced catching tripletail on the surface of the deep Atlantic in depths exceeding 1500'.

A strong incoming tide seems to entice them closer to shore. Speculation points this inshore movement is the initial stage in spawning rituals. The International Game Fish Association has recorded tripletail to a whopping 45 lbs.! This reveals that tripletail appear to live 10 or more years. They feed mostly on other fish and invertebrates but will hardly turn down any type of tasty crustaceans. Besides lurking throughout Florida

Research Lab. Approx. 80% of all recaptured tripletail had moved less than 100 miles from their initial tagging location, with just over 50% moving less than 30 miles. An amazing discovery was a distance of 235 miles traveled by a single fish from Englewood to Apalachicola Bay in 121 days, only to be recaptured again 46 days later, and only four miles away from the original tagging location.



## Participate in the tripletail tag & release program to ensure a healthy resource for years to come.

By: Captain Ariel Cabrera

Which migratory pelagic fish can be found in as deep as 500 fathoms or as shallow as 5 feet? Name just one species that's as talented as a camouflaged chameleon and is often mistaken for floating debris? If you answered "tripletail" to both, you're a winner!

It wasn't until recent years that tripletail, *lobotes surinamensis*, began to really spark the interest of saltwater fishermen statewide. Even the small fish provide great sport on light tackle and you don't have to be on a flat for excellent sight fishing opportunities. What's funny though, is tripletail don't even resemble a saltwater specimen. In fact, they are more reminiscent of a freshwater panfish, although on a larger scale. Tripletail is a species that is known for its uncanny ability to confuse, yet intrigue anglers.

An effort to learn more about these wonderful fish has created the necessity for organized research. In 2001, the Tripletail Tag and Release Program was initiated by the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. The first of its kind, the program is lead by fisheries biologist and scientists Jim Franks and Read Hendon and invites the participation of recreational anglers.

Participating volunteers use dart tags composed of polyethylene streamers which are bonded to non-toxic nylon heads to be inserted below the dorsal fin of released tripletail. Each dart tag has a corresponding tagging card where the anglers are asked to complete specific information. Exact length, location of release and the condition of fish at release are just some of the required pertinent data. Then and within a reasonable amount of time, participants mail their data cards to the GCRL where scientists compile all of the information.

The purposes of the tagging program are numerous. Public awareness and education lead the way, while the importance of updated research on this little known species is invaluable in protecting future stocks. Acknowledging participants is also crucial as without volunteer anglers, the program would cease to exist.

## The following data includes research based on the Tripletail Tag & Release Program from 2001 to 2003:

According to a recent newsletter from the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, there have been more than 100 tripletail tagging kits provided to volunteers. To date, 36 have contributed. There was a sum of 335 tripletail tagged and the majority of these fish (83%) were released