

Bonnie Marietta, Morro Bay, California

EXCERPTS FROM THE "FISH LIST" EMAIL UPDATES, 2002

May 23, 2002

With absolutely nothing happening here locally, Captain Mark, along with the majority of the Morro Bay salmon fishing fleet, has traveled some 20 plus hours north and are concentrating their efforts between Santa Cruz and Half Moon Bay. So far looking is pretty much all that has been going on. With very few fish being caught, it seems one must have a lucky horseshoe aboard! Surely there must be a black cloud hanging above the salmon fishing fleet! We are sad to say that we will not be selling this weekend ...

Currently the Bonnie Marietta is about 18 miles off Pigeon Point. Because they are so far offshore, more than likely they will drift at nighttime rather than try and return to port. Drifting will not be very peaceful because they are just outside of where all the freighters travel, or better described as being alongside the northbound entry lanes to San Francisco. This location is also part of a triangle where supposedly the heaviest concentration of white sharks live. Unfortunately Captain Mark has not had any sightings to share with you or comment on yet.

May 27, 2002

'Tis about time I brought you all some good tidings! Tonight Captain Mark reports having a couple of fairly successful fishing and catching days! ... Some adventures worth mentioning this week:

Captain Mark came across a group of about a dozen Humpback whales. Humpbacks are known as being one of the most interesting and gregarious great whales in the sea and can be very curious and will often times come right up to the fishing boats. Captain Mark was fortunate enough to witness one "breaching" right in front of the Bonnie Marietta. The whale rocked its entire body out of the water, and then crashed back down, filling the sea with foam and the air with thunder! Though this was quite a sight, the Captain quickly disengaged the autopilot and navigated the Bonnie Marietta to a safer distance. Earlier in the trip he was also greeted and then escorted by a group of porpoises. This is usually taken as a sign of good luck. Did you know that porpoises are also called small whales? They are mammals, not fishes, and are warm-blooded. Like other whales, they have lungs and breathe through a single nostril known as a blowhole, which is located on top of their head!

June 6, 2002

Captain Mark has had a challenging time this week. While fortunate to have found salmon in our "backyard" just off of Montana De Oro, the fishing has been spotty, making for some frustrating times. The windy and rough ocean, as well as some rogue sea lions have been the downside. As a matter of fact, today he was forced to quit early, as the sea lions took 90% of his catch.

These infamous mammals known as "Zalophus Californianus" vary in size depending on gender. The average female can reach up to 6 feet, weighing about 200 lbs., while the males (or bulls) can exceed 8 feet and weigh a 1000 or more pounds. On land they gather in groups, which are called colonies, however when they are in the ocean they form smaller groups called rafts. They will stalk fishermen, following them for hours and miles, and often haunt the same boat day after day. Did you know it is extremely rare for a sea lion to catch a healthy, free-swimming salmon in the ocean? This is why they stalk fisherman. Captain Mark has seen some of these bulls literally rip a salmon of 15 lbs. or more right off his fishing gear, toss the salmon up into the air, and then catch them head first and swallow them whole!

June 14, 2002

Captain Mark spent the past several days fishing off of Port San Luis. He said the week started with windy and rough conditions, but by midweek the weather calmed down and it was some of the nicest weather he has fished in so far this salmon season ...

While fishing this week Captain Mark saw several Basking Sharks that ranged from 20 to 30 feet in length. Basking Sharks are also known as "Big Mouth Sharks." They are filter feeders and primarily eat plankton. These sharks spend a lot of time on the surface swimming around with their mouths open as they filter their food from the water. Captain Mark said their mouths are so big that you could put a 6-foot sofa in them and still have room for the recliner! Though they are not aggressive and are generally harmless, fishermen will avoid these 3-4 ton creatures because they are not as smart as most large marine mammals and can get tangled in the fishing gear.

June 20, 2002

This week Captain Mark spent the majority of his time fishing right off Morro Bay. As a matter of fact, with a pair of binoculars he could actually see our house from where he spent most of his time. The week was blustery and windy, however Estero Bay usually provides somewhat of a lee from the prevailing northwest winds. Besides, when the fish are this close to home, the Captain can easily overlook the windy conditions ...

Though this week's fishing was a bit slower than last week, the brighter side is that the sea lions seemed to have backed off somewhat. Captain said it's probably because this is the time of year they go to the rookeries and their thoughts are on other things besides salmon!

June 27, 2002

Captain Mark was delighted in having come across several large schools of sardines, herring, and anchovies while fishing this week. These small baitfish are a big part of a salmon's diet and helped make the catching successful ...

Captain Mark saw several Humpback whales again in Estero Bay this week. He said if you were to stand on the Cayucos Pier you would easily be able to see them ...

With all the schools of sardines, herring, and anchovies around, salmon had a choice of entrees on their preferred menu. Did you know salmon will pretty much eat anything that swims and will fit into their mouth? In fact the Captain says they even get greedy, as he has seen them try to eat things that won't fit in their mouths!

Right now it appears that the best salmon production is happening off of San Francisco and the majority of the salmon fleet are up in that area, however Captain Mark has chosen to stay behind. Though the days have been long and the work hard, he is driven by his desire to keep our loyal customers happy and will continue to try and catch the few remaining fish in this area as long as practical.

June 28, 2002

I can tell you that this week's trip (well over a ton) is the largest Captain Mark has had since the season began ...

A lot of you may not be aware, but the Captain has been working solo for almost 30 days straight now, and is in need of some time to heal the body and soul. In addition to this much needed time off, we are planning our traditional 4th of July celebration with family and crew.

A special thanks to our crew for all their dedication and hard work: Dad ("Tog"); sisters Mary and Anne; children Marc and Leah; crew Daniel and Richard; backup crew Jim, Terri and Kirk. We couldn't do it without you!

July 3, 2002

Happy Fourth of July to all you! We will not be celebrating this weekend with dockside salmon sales. As stated in last week's e-mail, this week was in fact a "short week" for fishing. Unfortunately it was also an unproductive week, and Captain Mark had a hard time even finding enough for our family gathering. Those of you who have been with us for the past six years realize this is not unusual for this time of year.

There was some production eight hours north of here (Square Black Rock) but Mark spent the last several days looking closer to home. However some of California's better salmon fishing continues to be taking place in Northern California (San Francisco) and that is why the majority of the salmon fleet was there the past two weeks. Hopefully local conditions will improve; otherwise the Captain may have to make a northern trip too! Only time will tell, and with a little luck and weather cooperation we will get back on track with some catching in the next week or two.

Captain Mark did say that the ocean was flat, and smooth, with much life, including whales, and hundreds, upon hundreds of yearling sea lions, just no fish where he looked. He also relayed to me that there will be some salmon available from boats this week, but most is from LAST week's catching. We are confident that our regulars know what to look for and demand from fishermen direct sales, and will only accept the finest quality from clean and dedicated operations!

July 12, 2002

As expected, it appears we've approached that time of year when the salmon leave our local waters. Captain Mark started the week by making one last effort to find salmon nearby, but it just didn't happen, so yesterday he turned the Bonnie Marietta north and headed up the coast. After about 8 hours into the journey, he came across a pretty good spot of salmon!

The Captain and I spoke tonight but cell phone reception was so poor and most of the calls were dropped so I was not able to get all the information I would like to have. From what I was able to determine, today's evening catch was pretty good. The Captain made several attempts to call and update me but it was just too frustrating because we couldn't hear each other so he finally gave up. He will try to recontact me tomorrow with an update.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all you salmon lovers to "shake a leg" and don't "miss the boat" as this is the time of year we begin our transition from salmon to albacore fishing. When the traveling distance to the fishing grounds start to exceed 12 hours one way, it no longer becomes practical or safe for the Captain to continue. It appears we are at that time frame and are now on a day-to-day basis. I also understand there are reports of a few albacore in the area, but thus far not enough to justify any commercial quantities.

On a lighter note, as scorching hot as it has been inland recently imagine this ... Captain Mark said he has been wrapped in a blanket of fog out where he is! For those of you who have ever been lost in the fog, you know what a disorienting feeling it is! Fortunately the ocean has been flat calm and tonight he said the fog lifted just long enough for him to get a peek at the stunning vermilion red sunset!

July 12, 2002, P.M.

I have finally received word from Captain Mark! He says the fog has lifted somewhat today, the seas are still flat calm, and the fishing has been productive. The hard part for him right now is having to leave these conditions! Nevertheless a command decision has been made, and he is en-route home. Estimated traveling time is going to put him back in port around 2:00 in the morning. There will be much work once he arrives as the Bonnie Marietta must be made presentable; got to get her all dolled up for you folks! Captain Mark will be tired and therefore might be a little slower and maybe even a bit grumpy, ha ha!

July 21, 2002

Another late start this week for Captain Mark. So far he has had little luck in locating any large numbers of salmon that want to cooperate. As a result we are moving our usual Saturday fish sales to Sunday. Unless the catching part improves dramatically, only the earliest few folks with have fresh salmon for their effort. The ton of fish we went though in less than 3 hours last Saturday will make the 350 pounds on board right now seem like drop in the bucket! However we are forever optimistic; Captain Mark and the Bonnie Marietta will give it their best effort the next two days.

The little sign of albacore that showed up last week evaporated as quickly as they appeared, but as soon as they show up in commercial volume, Captain Mark will change gear. That is unless the salmon decide to come to dinner better than they have the last few days! We'll keep you posted on that.

The Captain does report some really outstanding albacore fishing off the Oregon and Washington coasts, and even off Vancouver Island, with the majority of large freezer boats fishing in the Northwest. The best salmon production is from Half Moon Bay to Bodega, but the 24-hour one-way transit makes it borderline at best for the Captain to run that far single-handed, and return the fish home to Morro Bay.

The Humpbacks continue to feed within sight of land, and many of our friends have witnessed them breaching from along the beaches just north of the Rock! Definitely worth watching if you time it just right!

July 25, 2002

Just one thing missing ... salmon!

Fishing conditions were almost perfect this week. The water temperature was good, and there was plenty of feed around and lots of dark water, unfortunately just one thing missing ... salmon! Captain Mark spent several days out this week and although he didn't exactly get skunked, he was not able to produce enough catch to allow us to conduct our weekly dockside sales.

So, unless we get a new wave of salmon in the area, the Captain is more than likely going to start focusing his efforts on albacore beginning next week. Albacore fishing usually takes place much farther off shore and therefore our fishing trips are weather dependent. The Bonnie Marietta must have cooperative weather. Captain Mark said there is a trickle of albacore about 30 to 40 miles SW of Morro Bay right now and a couple of boats are starting to catch a few fish.

Did you get up early enough to see the gorgeous sun rise Wednesday morning? While leaving the harbor that morning Captain Mark was almost hypnotized as he watched the full white gold moon set in the west, then within minutes he turned to the east to gaze upon the fiery red sunrise.

The pods of whales have moved towards Montana De Oro now and are in about 40 fathoms of water. If you still want to get a peek at them you might be able to do so from the Cable Landing parking lot. Captain Mark had the opportunity to take one of his nephews fishing with him this week. Gabriel got to see first hand what it is like being up close and personal with these enormous mammals as the Bonnie Marietta glided among a pod of 8-10 Humpback whales while they were feeding. Of course the Captain was simply delighted to be able to share this experience with his 12-year-old nephew.

August 1, 2002

Unfortunately we will not be conducting our dockside fish sales this weekend. This is due to a lack of any commercial volume of albacore in the area and some unsettled ocean conditions this week. Although this is disappointing, it was beneficial because Captain Mark, who is the President of the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization, had a couple of important meetings he needed to attend during the week. We are in hopes that next week's update will bring better news!

August 8, 2002

Captain Mark was out and about today and will do the same tomorrow, but so far there continues to be a lack of any real numbers of albacore at this time. The fish that are around are still scattered from about 10 to 40 miles out, and although a few commercial and sport fishermen are getting a little sampling, the Captain feels out of step mainly because of the lack of schools that will cooperate with any consistency. Once again the weather has been uncooperative in allowing us to get in step for any kind of weekend delivery. As of today it appears to be another disappointing week, as we do not have enough albacore to open shop this weekend. We hear fishing is presently very good in Southern California and so we remain very optimistic as we often have some of our best fishing later in the season!

August 15, 2002

Albacore catching has picked up nicely during the past couple of days. Just this morning the Captain caught word of some good scores close enough for us to try and bring a few home for this weekend.

Believe it or not, I am writing tonight's update from aboard the Bonnie Marietta! The Captain managed to talk me into going a day or two with him, so here I am about 50 miles off shore in the middle of the ocean. So far I am having a fantastic time and not a bit seasick. During our 6-hour journey to the fishing grounds I finally got to see several of the Humpback whales that I have written about in the past. Though we were not very close to them, they were still breathtaking to see.

I have been enjoying being at the helm for the past couple of hours and making the Captain work the deck. Ha, Ha! We were fortunate enough to catch a few fish before dark and will be giving it our best shot again tomorrow. With a little luck, we will hopefully have enough fish for dockside sales this weekend. We will send you all another update tomorrow evening when we know for sure.

August 16, 2002

From Leah (Mark and Bonnie's daughter): My mom and dad had a successful day albacore fishing and we are pleased to let you know that we will have about a ton of albacore for our dockside sales tomorrow. Please excuse this late posting. With Mom on the boat, it created some difficulties.

August 22, 2002

Unsettled, and unpredictable ocean conditions prevented us from making an effort at producing some albacore for this weekend. With the up and down forecast, and winds, we elected to stay tied to the boards, and hope for better days. We still believe that the season is just getting going, and we know the ocean will calm.

Many of you who are longtime members of the Bonnie Marietta "Fish List" know albacore is much more weather dependent than salmon. I have included the weather site we use for watching current, and forecasted conditions. You may find it useful: National Weather Service, San Francisco Bay Area, Marine Forecasts, www.wrh.noaa.gov/Monterey/marine.html

August 30, 2002

The weather has finally taken a turn for the better and so Captain Mark headed out to sea just yesterday. Right now he is approximately 55 miles offshore and as of tonight, reports having somewhere between 1700 to 1800 lbs. of albacore on board! The Captain and the Bonnie Marietta will be heading home with their catch tomorrow morning (and knowing him as I do, he will probably be fishing along the way so I don't expect him to be back in port until late Friday night), but at least he will be back in time for us to conduct our fish sales this weekend!

Captain Mark said the southeasterly conditions on the ocean have made for a comfortable and rather interesting journey. Tonight he saw schools of squid under the Bonnie Marietta. The squid are attracted to the boat because of the light, and we like that because it's a very good sign, as albacore adore snacking on squid! He also said there were swarms of dragonflies and even some moths out there. Every once in a while some of them would land on the deck of the Bonnie Marietta, as if to take a short rest, and then they would fly off again. Well, I don't know about you, but I thought he was pulling my leg! I thought ... now what would dragonflies be doing 55 miles offshore? But when I stopped to think about it, I said OK it's possible ... they could have gotten carried off shore with the breeze and become lost or confused, not knowing which way was left and which was right. Hum? As it turns out, dragonflies can actually fly for great distances and they have even been known to migrate clear across the ocean! Did you know that dragonflies are the fastest flying insects? As matter of fact dragonflies can travel at speeds of 35 miles an hour while albacore usually only travel 6 miles per day.

Sept. 5, 2002

Captain Mark made an effort to get back out there and catch more fish this week but at 45 miles out he was forced to return to port because of increasing wind, and building seas, so we will not be conducting our dockside sales this weekend.

It seemed like the closer Captain Mark got to the fishing grounds the angrier the ocean became! When the Bonnie Marietta began taking water over the bow, the Captain decided he had had enough and elected to turn around and bring her back home. You weather watchers probably know that south swell from Hurricane Hernan didn't help either.

This past week many of you may have heard of the boat that was hit by a breaching whale, and tragically one life was lost. We have received some questions requesting the Captain's perspective on the incident. Captain Mark relayed to me that although whale versus boat interaction is extremely rare, it does happen, and if you ever saw a breaching whale you would know that such an accident could happen.

Sept. 12, 2002

The weather moderated the last couple of days and a body of albacore is reported to still be to the SW at about 65 to 70 miles, but as of yesterday fishing was limited. A few boats from Morro Bay are on the grounds, but the Captain opted to not go this week as he and I will be celebrating our 24th wedding anniversary with a 4-day weekend get away.

We apologize for a lack of fish this week, and such a sporadic albacore season, but we still have faith of a few good weeks to come. We shall continue to keep you posted with our Thursday e-mail updates.

Sept 19, 2002

Captain Mark left port once again during the wee hours this morn aboard the Bonnie Marietta and is now back out at sea doing what he does best ... catching albacore! Earlier today he reported nice ocean conditions, and with exception of the fog, said the weather was being pretty cooperative out there. Communications were on the poor side tonight (you could say a little foggy) and so the Captain may not be able to recontact me again until tomorrow or possibly not until Saturday. Right now I don't know exactly how far out he is or how successful the fishing was today, but as soon as I know more I'll send you another update with sales confirmation, the average fish weight, etc.

This past week there was an incident involving a local fishing boat selling dockside that was brought to the Captain's attention and due to the circumstances involved, the Captain felt compelled to share the following with you:

Note from Captain Mark: I usually don't like to comment on other boats that sell direct, because I don't want my remarks to sound like "sour grapes." I strongly support those in our industry who have a desire to provide you, the ultimate consumer, with quality fish at a fair price. Like this past weekend, I cannot always have the product that you want or deserve, so I like to see other boats selling fish. However a boat that sells several slips north of the Bonnie Marietta's location, had an entire load of albacore rejected by a local buyer this past weekend, yet he proceeded to sell his catch directly to consumers anyway. Obviously any concern for the safety of those he sold to, outweighed his need to make a buck. The buyer told me that he could smell the fish upon this boat's arrival dockside, and after checking the core temperature of several fish, he found most to be in the 50-degree range.

For your information iced fish should be in the mid 20-degree range, and frozen fish should be in the teens. An improperly cared for iced fish, is of far poorer quality than a fresh frozen fish. I believe fresh albacore should be gutted, gilled and immediately iced at sea upon its harvest.

Otherwise you may be better off purchasing a fresh frozen fish in the round. However take caution that a freezer boat doesn't sell you a fish that has been defrosted, and call it fresh.

We are proud of our fish and take extra steps to assure they are superior to most. We also want you to know there is other good fish available; just please be careful and if the operation looks questionable, consider walking away.

Sept. 20, 2002

Captain Mark had a very good day at sea and as of this evening reports having caught, spiked, bled, gutted, and gilled at least a ton of albacore! These fish are firmly packed on ice in the fish hold aboard the Bonnie Marietta and with only one day left on the ocean, the Captain shall begin his journey home so that he can deliver this bounty from the sea to you!

... In closing I would like to remind you that we are approaching the end of the albacore season and Captain Mark may only be attempting another trip or two before calling it a year. Sea ya!

Sept. 26, 2002

The Bonnie Marietta headed back out to sea again early this morning with Captain Mark at the helm. Currently they are about 55 miles offshore and experiencing some nice ocean conditions. When he checked in with me tonight the Captain was pleased to report having had a pretty successful first day out! He stated the fishing was especially exciting late this afternoon and estimates the majority of the albacore he caught are in the 20-pound range!

Sept. 29, 2002

Just a quick note with some good news for those of you who were not able to make it down to the boat on Sunday: we did not sell out and we are happy to let you know we will be open for dockside sales again on Monday, September 30th starting at 8:00 a.m.

... Just wanted to let you all know so you don't miss this quite possible end-of-season catch. Please feel free to call us before heading our way if you want to confirm quantities and we will be happy to update you.

Oct. 10, 2002

Previous family commitments kept the Captain from fishing again this week and so we will not be conducting our dockside sales this weekend.

Unfortunately October is when we usually wrap up our consumer-direct fish sales for the year. There are still some albacore around but they often shy away from our troll gear and go to live bait, and light line. Since the Bonnie Marietta is primarily a jig-fishing vessel, it can be unproductive to pursue them. Captain Mark hasn't put away the albacore gear just yet, but the old salt is about ready for a long winter's nap!

We hope you were able to get your fill of fresh salmon and albacore this year and for those of you who did not ... there is a chance the Captain may try to make another trip by the month's end.

Oct. 18, 2002

As most of you know who have been with us over the years, October is the time that our family traditionally ceases dockside sales for the winter. Although some jig production took place last week, albacore fishing has slowed, and will be mostly spotty, finally disappearing until next season. So, unless something extraordinary happens, this will be our final weekly report until the spring of 2003.

Just a reminder for the newer "Fish List" folks: our dockside sales usually commence May 1, with salmon. Our efforts then switch to albacore mid-July, which ends for us around September 30. We do have some research charters booked for the winter, but without the intensity of a major retrofit like we did on the Bonnie Marietta last winter, our off-season will proceed at a much calmer pace than last year.

You all make such an impact on the success of our direct fish sales, that you deserve many thanks. Bonnie, all my family members, and I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks for your patronage. We truly feel it is a pleasure, and a privilege to provide for you some of the ocean's bounty that we are blessed with!

In addition, my personal thanks go out to my family: Mom, Dad, Mary, Anne, Gabriel, Serena, Levi, Daniel, Richard, Bonnie, Marc, and Leah, as well as friends, Jim, Terri, Kirk, and Trish. Without them, I could not even attempt to provide the service you deserve.