

Bonnie Marietta, Morro Bay, California

EXCERPTS FROM THE "FISH LIST" EMAIL UPDATES, 2003

April 25, 2003

"Season's Greetings," as in California King Salmon Season! We hope the winter months have been good to all of you, and welcome to the first of our weekly postings for the 2003 fishing season. The California Commercial Salmon Season opens next Thursday (May 1), and although the forecast is for a good harvest, there hasn't been much sign yet other than outside Half Moon Bay. (Recreational season has been open since the end of last month.) ... Sooner or later we hope to be blessed with some good fishing as well as catching, giving you all a chance at eating some fine California King Salmon. Hopefully these late cold fronts will subside, and the traditional northwest winds will set up some strong upwellings, bringing lots of life, including salmon.

May 1, 2003

Today was the opening of the 2003 California King Salmon season, and although not extremely productive in the local waters, there was more salmon around than I anticipated. No, we did not catch enough to open shop this weekend, but we had a good sign, so maybe things are just developing. We did locate some substantial "balls" of feed (mostly krill, which salmon do love), but just not a lot of salmon yet.

May 8, 2003

Salmon continue to be elusive in our local waters, so dockside sales will have to wait until the catching equals the fishing ... Even the sighting of porpoises could not bring us the luck they often do, and which we badly need!

The good news is that the salmon fishing has been very good from Bodega Bay to Pt. Arena. Finer local markets and restaurants should have California King Salmon, and if they don't, demand it, as they have had an opportunity to stock it. The bad news is that where the salmon are cooperating creates a logistical nightmare for me (a minimum of 24 to 30 hours in good weather one-way for the Bonnie Marietta).

... I am often asked the origin of the Bonnie Marietta's name. So in honor of Mother's Day, and several very important moms, here is how we got it. The "Bonnie" is easy and many of you have met her, my wife. "Mar" is for my sister, Mary; in the beginning, she and her husband were my partners. Finally "ietta" is for my Mom, Henrietta. Thus "Bonnie Marietta."

May 15, 2003

Captain Mark brings us good news tonight: he is currently homeward bound with fresh California King Salmon on board ...

While up in Monterey Bay, the Captain came across a pod of Orcas. He was able to watch these "Killer Whales" for about an hour. You may be interested to know that Orcas live in small, close-knit pods of 6-40 whales; they are very social animals. The bonds between the members are strong and last for life. The members hunt together in a very sophisticated manner, attacking even very large prey and then sharing it. The pod members protect the young, the sick, and the injured. These killer whales belong to the family of dolphins and grow to be about 33 feet long, weighing 8 to 12,000 pounds. They are the largest member of the dolphin family.

What wondrous treasures the bountiful ocean can gently deposit at your side. After 33 years on the ocean, Captain Mark was absolutely thrilled to have found his first glass fishing float today! Glass floats have been found all around the world from ocean-bordered countries and usually during or after a storm. The float Captain Mark found is a stunning light aqua blue and about the size of a basketball. The Captain believes it is a genuine Japanese long line float which are typically found about 700-800 miles off shore, yet he found this one 10 miles off Santa Cruz this afternoon.

May 22, 2003

Captain Mark has made the trek back up north again spending most of his time anchored at Santa Cruz waiting for the winds to calm. He may need to make another seven or ten-hour jump further north for better fishing. He had quite a bumpy trip back up the hill as winds were gusting over 25 knots, causing the Bonnie Marietta to pitch and roll, taking the occasional "green water" over the bow. The Captain explains that on certain waves the bow does not raise quick enough, causing "green water" to crash over the bow. Wet, wild, and glad I wasn't with him ...

May 29 2003

Captain Mark called from San Francisco last night with news from his travels. He has been attempting to locate enough volume of production to justify returning home with a reasonable catch. His travel time from San Francisco is around 24 hours...

There continues to be very good fishing around Pt. Arena, but that is another 10 to 12 hours travel time north for the Bonnie Marietta. Captain Mark has been concentrating his fishing within striking distance of home ... In addition the sea lions are creating unbelievable havoc, stealing between 30 and 60 percent of the fish that are hooked!

June 5, 2003

The Bonnie Marietta is still up north somewhere between Pt Arena and Bodega Bay tonight. Many of you may remember Alfred Hitchcock's thriller "The Birds," which was filmed in Bodega Bay in 1963. Well, tonight while Captain Mark and I were talking, he happened to mention to me how odd it was to see so many Albatross this week. These majestic sea birds have a wingspan of up to 3.5 meters (approx. 9 feet) and have been described as one of the most spectacular sights for ocean travelers. Captain Mark said he usually only sees one or two at a time, but the past couple of days he has been seeing in excess of 50 of these giant birds!

You may be interested to know that Albatross are true pelagic birds, coming on shore only once a year to breed and they are abundant offshore. Albatrosses are nomadic birds that spend months wandering great distances over the oceans. They sleep while floating on the ocean surface, drink seawater and feed on cuttlefish and other small marine animals. Oftentimes Albatrosses will follow a ship for days!

June 6, 2003

Captain Mark checked in with me again just a few minutes ago to confirm that he is heading home. The good Lord has blessed him with a spectacular bounty of Salmon! The Captain said these are some of the most outstanding Salmon he has ever caught and that he has at least 2 tons on board! ... From his current location he is a minimum of 30 hours away and weather permitting he can logistically make it back to port by late Saturday.

June 12 2003

The weather forecast for this weekend calls for gale winds, so Captain Mark left port Monday night as he was eager to get the Bonnie Marietta back up to the fishing grounds before then... Currently the Bonnie Marietta is back in San Francisco Bay, securely docked and just waiting for the weather to cooperate so she can get back to the fishing grounds!

Captain Mark reports hearing some early Albacore news that included a few fish scattered from 30 to 50 miles SW of Morro Bay. We shall however continue to focus on Salmon until such time as the Albacore make a bigger presence!

June 19, 2003

Since arriving back in the San Francisco area last Wednesday, the majority of the forecast has included "gale warnings" with NW winds 25 to 35 knots, and swells 11 to 14 feet at 10 seconds or less ... the endless winds have caused the fleet to be tied fast to the docks from Fort Bragg to Half Moon Bay.

June 26, 2003

After two long weeks of being tied to the dock in San Francisco, the Bonnie Marietta is back out to sea! The wind has finally calmed down long enough for the fishing fleet to venture back out and venturing they are! As of tonight the Bonnie Marietta is back up in the area of Bodega Bay...

Today Capt Mark watched in amazement as a 10-12 great white shark snacked on salmon for lunch! You may be interested to know that great white sharks' prey includes a wide variety of bony fishes, such as salmon, hake, halibut, mackerel and tunas, as well as other sharks, sea turtles, seabirds and marine mammals. We are just beginning to realize the important role they play in keeping seal and sea lion numbers in check. Scientists have been documenting great white predatory and feeding behavior off the Farallon Islands and videotaping attacks on pinnipeds (seals and sea lions, the shark's favorite prey) to understand how these awesome

killing machines operate. Since the great white sharks help to control the sea lion population, Captain Mark has no problem giving up a salmon here and there to these voracious and efficient predators!

June 29, 2003

I have fantastic news from Captain Mark tonight ... he has started his 30-hour run back home from the Bodega Bay area with another outstanding catch, bringing reality to "patience is a virtue"!

July 10, 2003

The Bonnie Marietta is back up in San Francisco again tonight after a long and brutal journey. There was a very small weather window that soon closed in after Captain Mark left port late Monday night. The ocean was relentless as the winds blew about 25 knots as he headed towards the Piedras Blancas lighthouse. Then while rounding Pt. Sur, winds picked up to 35-40 knots, blowing so hard that ocean water was forced up under some of the windows of the Bonnie Marietta!

Even though the ocean conditions were rough, Capt. Mark could not help but notice acres upon acres of *Velella velella*, most commonly known as "By-the-Wind-Sailors." I'm sure that many of you have seen these small blue and clear jellyfish when they have washed ashore. During certain times of the year many hundreds of thousands of these colonial polyps get washed ashore due to seasonal winds and currents, covering the beach like a blanket.

Weather forecast for the remainder of the week is windy, so Captain Mark has decided to batten down the hatches, stay put in San Francisco, and catch up on some sleep!

July 18, 2003

After days of waiting for a break in the weather while docked in San Francisco, the Captain elected to slide back down the coast and try his luck near Santa Cruz. So far he has been struggling with an ocean where the winds have made the more productive areas impossible to reach. Although there is still plenty of wind outside of Santa Cruz, he is at least able to put in partial days there...

On the more interesting side of things this week the Captain reported seeing some hump back whales and some blue whales, some more blue whales, and then even more blue whales! It seems as though he was just surrounded by an ocean full of whales this week and on average saw about 10-12 blue whales and 40-50 hump back whales per day. Did you know the blue whale is the largest animal that ever lived on Earth? They can grow to be a 100 feet in length and weigh over 150 tons! Hard to picture? Well, think of it this way ... The Bonnie Marietta is 38 feet long and weighs 21 tons. Now imagine one of these giants (nearly three times her length and weighing over seven times more) surfacing about 30-40 feet away! Pretty intimidating, huh? These whales can surface rather quietly and oftentimes the Captain did not even know they were there until he heard the extremely loud noise they make when exhaling through their blowholes (nostrils),

which is immediately followed by a very "distinctive smell" that fills the air and then of course there is "the spray" that comes from a stream that can rise up to 40 feet into the air! Captain Mark said he just about jumps clean out of his rain-gear every time this happens, which is several times a day ...

July 24, 2003

After selling Sunday afternoon, and taking care of my research charter early in the week, it didn't leave much time to pursue any fish. I filled the week with engine maintenance, and the installation of another radar. With the way visibility has been recently, the added security will be nice.

I can report a really flat ocean most all week, and although nothing really hot within my range, both salmon fishing at Ft. Bragg, CA, and albacore fishing at Newport, OR is outstanding ...

July 31, 2003

Mid-July is when we usually go through the transition of switching our efforts and fishing gear from Salmon to Albacore. This year was no exception as Captain Mark left port early Wednesday morning (during that thunder and lightening storm) in pursuit of Albacore. He has found a small spot of fish about 50 miles west of Morro Bay and as of tonight reports having caught approximately 1,500 lbs...

What weird weather this week brought? While the thunder and lightening was quite a spectacular show to watch while at sea, Captain Mark said fishing during some of those major downpours was quite different! He said he couldn't remember when it ever rained this long and hard on the ocean this time of year. In addition, the foggy weather brought him lots of moths and some kind of green bugs, a few dragonflies and some land birds...

August 7, 2003

All one has to do to is look at the windy ocean this evening to know that the Bonnie Marietta is already back in her slip. Two weeks of a calm ocean came to an end, and turned us back early this morning.

Tuesday afternoon we heard off some good fishing 65 miles west of Morro Bay. After securing fuel, ice, and provisions we left for the grounds at 10:00 PM. An uneventful trip lasted until abeam of San Simeon, and then the breeze began to build at a steady pace. By daylight we had beat our way to where we wanted to begin, and with worsening conditions we were determined to at least cover our expenses. Although rough, and windy, the day brought some good fishing, with almost 90 fish, but the winds increased, and the swell heightened...

August 14, 2003

Small craft warnings offshore this past week, have kept the Bonnie Marietta tied to the "boards," and with the offshore winds forecasted to be 20 to 30 knots, with gusts to 40 the next couple of

days, you know where you will find me! Often when the inland temperatures heat up like they have, the Northwest breeze can really pick up velocity on the ocean. It can be deceptive because the beaches are so nice, but all one has to do is look at the horizon in the afternoons, and see what the offshore conditions are like.

Many have seen the bright lights just north of the Morro Rock at night, and the fleet of recreational boats during the day. Well, some squid have showed up like they do every few years and the white sea bass are never too far behind. The bright lights are commercial squid boats that use lights to bring the squid to the surface, ("float" is the term that is used) and then with a large purse seine they wrap the squid. The net is like a large purse and after wrapping the school, they pull a rope on the bottom that is just like the strings to a purse and close the bottom of the net. Then large suction pumps suck the squid aboard.

The recreational boats have been having success by catching a few squid with "squid jigs," then baiting their hooks with several whole squid, and then drifting their hooks from their boats. Some of the fish have ranged from 30 to over 50 pounds!

August 21, 2003

Calm, calm, ocean, slow, slow fishing, makes for great boat rides, but not for having any albacore to sell. After 10 days of nonstop winds, they backed off and the ocean was as peaceful as she gets. However with only scattered catches of albacore and a commitment at a local fundraiser, we did not venture out looking for albacore this week. (I drew the short straw again this year and continue as president of our local fishing association) Anyhow, just as with salmon, patience will prove to be a virtue ... There has been a few albacore both 40 miles SW of Morro Bay, and 70 miles west in the Sur Canyon, but not the commercial volume we need to offset the skyrocketing fuel prices. The squirt of sea bass just north of Morro Rock has subsided, with most of the fish moving north.

I have fielded numerous questions regarding the unfortunate attack by a white shark that killed a woman earlier this week in Avila Beach. With exploding pinniped populations, we are fortunate it doesn't happen more often. White sharks are superior predators, and with the hundreds and hundreds of sea lions frequenting Avila Beach, I am sure there is not just one but several, if not many, white sharks in the area. This is true for the entire coast of California. Although those that frequent the ocean waters, swimming, surfing, kayaking, etc., take a risk in doing so, I still think the risk is extremely small. I don't think it necessary to stop enjoying the pleasures the ocean can bring, because of a single incident; however swimming at Avila Beach for the balance of the summer may not be a risk worth taking. I know when I walked my dog on the beach this morning, I did not throw her bumper out as far as I usually do!

August 28, 2003

What patience I have is wearing thin, and by next week I may need to make the jump to at least Monterey in order to put together a dockside sale ... As soon as a weather window develops we may make the move, and hope we will be blessed with a trip to bring home. Often some of our

better albacore fishing takes place in September, and into October. Only time will tell, as every year is different.

I did get word of some salmon off San Simeon, but a day trip up there proved there was no commercial volume available. I did have a first that day, however! Over the years I have numerous types of land birds and insects take refuge on the boat when foggy conditions persist. However just after daybreak, a small creature flew in my rear door, and gave me a startle. Give me 20 or even 30 knots of NW wind and ten feet of sea, and it doesn't faze me, but when this visitor tuned out to be a BAT, I quickly exchanged the warmth of the wheelhouse for the open air of my back deck. Now I am not sure where it ended up, but I believe it found the darkness of my bunkroom inviting, and I still haven't decided to go looking for it.

September 5, 2003

I truly wish I had good news for you but albacore continue to be elusive anywhere between Point Sur, and Point Conception. Frustrating, but long time members of the Bonnie Marietta "fish list" know that it's called fishing, not catching. There continues to be some fair scores offshore Santa Cruz, but they too has been sporadic and scattered at times ...

P.S. Thanks for all the cute remarks regarding my pet bat, which is thankfully AWOL.

September 11, 2003

Have the albacore forgotten where Morro Bay is? Week after week of frustration continues, as albacore scores anywhere within 100 miles of Morro Bay have been scattered at best ... With the high cost of fuel Captain Mark hopes to hear some encouraging news before venturing too far. One of his friends just spent 4 days for 22 fish, which of course is paddling backwards at best. ... Most the large offshore albacore boats remain off the Oregon Coast, and the salmon have stayed very steady from Fort Bragg north, but all too far for any attempt at "fresh" fish sales for us.

September 16, 2003

Although we try to schedule the catching with weekend sales, the fish don't know that, and at this point in the albacore season we are not going to be picky. I had an opportunity, and a weather window to slide 85 miles to the Southwest for the last two days, and although the fishing is mostly a "bait show," they did want to bite the jigs at times. Sometimes larger fish shy away from the heavier commercial troll gear, consisting of at least 200-pound monofilament, and artificial lures ...

I did have the company of two Killer Whales for an afternoon. They seemed to be a pair of adolescent bulls, all by themselves, following me back and forth, never getting too far away, but never very close. One was the standard white on black, but the other was more of a cream color on black. Orcas south of Alaska (transient pods) prefer marine mammals, while many resident pods in the Pacific Northwest are fish eaters. I have heard other fishers talk of seeing them eat albacore, but I never have witnessed it, and this pair seemed more curious than hungry!

September 26, 2003

There still seems to be some albacore around, limited to a small area, but moving a little closer to Morro Bay, but we will NOT have fish this week. Upon returning last week from the fishing grounds the Bonnie Marietta developed a cracked exhaust elbow, which required replacement parts that only arrived a couple of days ago. Hopefully all repairs will be completed today or tomorrow, and when the seas quiet down we will chase the albacore once again.

October 2, 2003

Recent reports still confirm a small body of Albacore 70 miles SW of Morro Bay, but once again unsettled ocean conditions have eliminated our effort. ... Even the research charter that I have scheduled for early this next week has had to be shuffled because of a forecasted increasingly westerly swell ... Those long time "fish list" folks have seen both the abundance and the disappointment the Pacific Ocean has to give.

October 9, 2003

As the chill of the fall starts to fill the air, the chances of another albacore trip seem slim. "Small Craft Advisories" all week have become "Gale Warnings" with an additional advisory for "Heavy Surf." So even the Tognazzini family is in need of some albacore for the freezer, smoker, and canner, and yet we aren't getting the opportunity for one last trip. We may have to stretch what's left of last season's stock as our meager albacore production has left us ... One more week, and we will see!

Final report, Friday, October 17, 2003

There comes the time in our season when the decision must be made, and as badly as we all could use more albacore, it just hasn't come to pass. So as of this posting we will conclude our dockside sales for 2003. With heartfelt warmth, we truly thank you all for your continued patronage. The excitement that is generated around our sales is only possible because of your dedication and patience, and we look forward to the 2004 season with much hope ...

Off-season this year will include research commitments, boat maintenance, and lots of family time as well as numerous encounters between my dog, some birds, and myself ...

We will miss you all, but May 2004 will be here before you know it. Again please accept our warmest thanks, as it is you that makes this concept of fishermen direct sales work!