

Observer of the Month (Fall)

July 2015: Talilla Schuster (M71)

Talilla has been a reliable and hard working observer ever since she started as an ASM in April 2014. She is stationed in Portland, ME but also lives in Provincetown, MA. Right out of training, Talilla did an excellent job being very thorough and detailed with her catch estimation, disposition codes, and providing comments. She calls if she has questions after trips, but uses her resources first. During times of sparse trips, Talilla does well remembering protocols and still continues to improve her data quality. She has a great attitude and gets along well with captains and crew. She was featured in the Provincetown's Wicked Local online news on May 30th, titled "Local woman translates Provincetown upbringing into science and water based career."

August 2015: Matt Lee (L98)

Matt has been an At-Sea-Monitor since May 2013 and an Industry-Funded-Scallop observer since June 2014. He has completed a total of 197 sea days between the two programs. Over the last several months, a period that has seen a rise in friction with the groundfish industry, he has continued to take many ASM trips. He has maintained good relations with the captains and crew, and has done his work to a high standard, often with no errors at all. Matt does similarly well on his IFS trips, and always takes a good number of biological samples, including frozen samples. He keeps good records for his trips in his notebook, always returns calls to debrief promptly and has an excellent attitude.

September 2015: Matt Roux (M44)

Matt has been a NEFOP observer since January, 2014 and has completed 89 trips thus far. He has trained on many types of gears including high volume, pot and trap, and clam/quahog dredge. He does a wide variety of trips including lobster, fish trap, pair trawl, as well as bottom trawl and gillnet. Matt always does an excellent job with data collection even while learning new gear protocols. His catch estimation work is always well documented and his comments are thorough and well thought out. Despite working a lot he is very good at returning calls and emails, although his work rarely needs more than a short debrief.

Congratulations!

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Transition to Industry Funded At-Sea Monitoring (ASM)

The transition to industry-funded Northeast Multispecies Groundfish At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) occurred on March 1, 2016 as previously announced. Government contracts with individual providers no longer exist, as the groundfish sectors are now contracting directly with approved At-Sea Monitor providers. All sector trips with a sail date of March 1st, or later that are selected for ASM coverage by the pre-trip notification system (PTNS) will be paid for by the industry and signed contracts between the sector and providers will become active.

The Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) groundfish coverage will continue to operate normally under the federal contract and selected NEFOP groundfish sector trips will have no cost to the vessel and will continue to be paid for with federal funds.

It is very important that you properly identify yourselves when taking trips as there are different payment structures for NEFOP and ASM trips. Identifying yourself properly may help avoid confusion or potential conflict.

We, the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program staff will continue to support you during this transition and in the future. If you have any questions or concerns please let us know as soon as possible. Any questions or concerns regarding the transition should be directed to Amy Martins at (Amy.Martins@noaa.gov or 508-495-2266)or KB McArdle at (Katherine.McArdle@noaa.gov at 508-495-2377).

Something fishy...Less common fish species seen by observers like you!

Roudi Escalar, *Promethichthys prometheus* (Gempylidae)

- Slender, laterally compressed, barracuda like shape (maximum to 100 cm SL) with black or gray metallic color overall, a bluish or purple cast on upper surface, and the first dorsal fin dark. It has a single lateral line that deflects distinctly downward just below the anterior dorsal just behind the pectoral fin. Other characteristics include a chin without a fleshy triangular tab and a small pelvic fin present only until it grows to about 40 cm. It is typically encountered beyond the shelf break to 750 m depth, moving nearer to the surface at night to feed. It has a worldwide distribution in tropical and subtropical waters of all oceans (Code 6638, MACKEREL, SNAKE, NK).



CHECK
YO SELF!

What disposition code should be used for fish that are discarded because the TAC (total allowable catch) for the quarter has been filled? : (Answer on next page)

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In July-September 2015, ever wonder how your trips match up?

See for yourself!

Most fish lengths taken on a single trip: 1060 by Tom Butler (N27)

Most incidental takes on a single trip: 53 by Matt Roux (M44)

Most trips by a single observer: 48 by Erika Klinkhammer (M14)



Regional Lobster Workshop

As NEFOP coverage of the commercial lobster fishery has increased in the past few years, the potential for overlap between state and federal sea sampling programs also has increased. Some industry members and state managers were concerned that the sea sampling programs are redundant and wasteful. To address these concerns, Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and NEFOP staff met with representatives of regional lobster management and assessment programs in Gloucester in October. This meeting was geared towards developing a shared understanding of similarities and differences among regional lobster observer programs and to evaluate the potential to develop more integrated programs throughout the region. The goals of the workshop were to: 1) summarize the similarities and differences among state sampling and NEFOP sampling; 2) evaluate potential for integrating programs while still meeting current regional regulatory and scientific requirements and minimizing impact on individual lobstermen; and 3) develop timelines and responsibilities for future action.

The proposed actions aim to maintain or improve scientific quality (through random vessel selection and efficient sample design) and responsiveness to industry and state manager concerns. Acceptance of random selection in this fishery may not happen instantly or universally, but will hopefully increase over time. The proposed actions also include elements that will improve regional operational efficiency and standardization, including but not limited to standardization of lobster egg stage definitions, shell disease characterization, safety training, and bycatch sampling. Results of the workshop consensus report will be disseminated through ASMFC and NOAA communications channels.

Lobster Tagging Project

The Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen's Association (AOLA) recently wrapped up a small lobster tagging project in cooperation with NEFOP, MRAG Americas, and New Hampshire Fish and Game. Four observers: Greg Sanborn, Tim Anderson, Matt Roux, and Mike Radziszewski, completed a total of five tagging trips on offshore lobster vessels. As many v-notched, egg-bearing, or oversize lobsters as possible were tagged using equipment provided by AOLA and NH Fish and Game. A total of 2,611 tags were applied by observers during the course of the study. Data from the tagged lobsters will be used to model movement, growth, and other factors for years to come as a result. Stay tuned for study results over the coming months. If you come across a tagged lobster (see photos), please remember to fill out an IAL and comment on the molt status, number of claws, presence/absence of a v-notch, and presence/absence of eggs. If the crew is not keeping the lobster, leave the tag in and discard the lobster as normal. If the crew is keeping the lobster, ask if they plan to mail the tag in—if not, please retain the tag and mail in with your trip.



Did You Know?

In 2014, we conducted 657 interviews with captains:

- 1) Was the observer on time?
100% said yes
- 2) Did the observer explain their duties?
97% said yes
- 3) Did the observer weigh the catch?
98% said yes
- 4) Did the observer take lengths and/or biological samples from the catch?
98% said yes
- 5) Did the observer hinder your operations in any way?
98% said no
- 6) Did the observer get along with you and your crew?
98% said yes
- 7) Would this observer be welcome on your boat again?
99% said yes
- 8) Did the observer offer you a copy of the data?
93% said yes
- 9) Did the observer offer a Captains Comment Card?
93% said yes

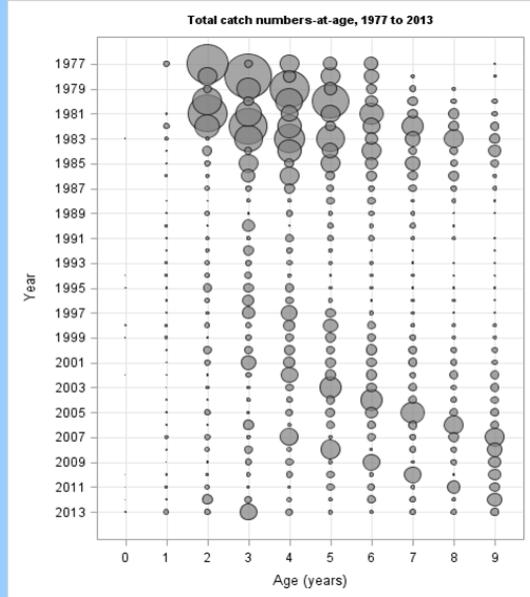
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How Are Observer Data Used?

Observer data are used for a variety of scientific and management purposes. Two of the most common are stock assessments and quota monitoring. Stock assessments are used to determine the current biomass of a particular species, species group (e.g., the skate complex), or stock (sub-group of a species that is physically separated by area). These assessments can be incredibly complex, and include a wide array of data sources (see <http://nefsc.noaa.gov/saw>). Observer data may be combined with commercial fisheries data (landings), fisheries independent surveys, age and growth determination, natural mortality studies, gear catchability studies, and more. Some stock assessments are age based, meaning the scientists will attempt to calculate the biomass at each age level. To do this, they must know how length and age are related for that particular species, which is determined from the age structures (scales, otoliths, and vertebrae) that NEFOP and IFS observers send in. From there, they apply an age-length key to all length frequency samples collected from all programs. This lets them calculate how many fish of each age were taken in each fishery and area. The goal of an assessment is to determine the health of a stock, such as if overfishing is occurring or if the stock is recovering. Some stocks have shown great recovery over recent years, such as haddock and sea scallops, but others are still struggling. Managing multiple stocks that are all linked and interconnected is incredibly difficult.

Quota monitoring is a management tool used to evaluate how close a fishery has come to a predetermined quota or “catch cap”. These caps are developed following an assessment; managers must figure out how best to allocate catch across fisheries, states, sectors, etc. These management plans are made by the Northeast Fishery Management Council (<http://www.nefmc.org/>) and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (<http://www.mafmc.org/>); state management plans fall under the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (<http://www.asmfc.org/>). Observer data are used to determine whether thresholds have been met, which may result in area closures, gear restrictions, or other accountability measures to counteract the effects of exceeding the quota. Discard rates for each stock and stratum (typically a unique combination of gear type, mesh size, area, and possibly sector) are calculated from observed hauls as a ratio of the observed species discard weight divided by the total kept weight for all species. To calculate the total discards, scientists multiply the stock-species-specific observed discard rate by the total landings within that stratum. Generally, if the total discards and landings exceed the threshold, then accountability measures will be enacted. It is critical that observers submit timely data to avoid potentially erroneous decisions being made in these quick actions.



Total catch at each age class for Gulf of Maine haddock, calculated from observer data and landings.

NEFSC and OLE's Stance Against Observer Mistreatment

The below quotes are taken from the New England Fishery Management Council Meeting held on September 29th, 2015 in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

“Given the tension and the real concerns and issues that we are collectively struggling with, I’d like to ask the Council and the industry in general to do the best they can not to visit those concerns and tension on the at-sea monitors and the observers themselves. They are doing the best job they can; they really are doing an excellent job given the circumstances that we are placing them under. But there have been increased reports of tension of unpleasantness in the way that individuals have been treated on certain vessels and while I fully understand the tensions and the concerns and the anxiety, I really would ask that you take whatever steps you can to avoid visiting those concerns on the observers themselves.” - Dr. Bill Karp, Science Director, North East Fisheries Science Center

“I’d like to pause and put an exclamation mark on the comments that Bill Karp had mentioned on the issue of observer harassment, interference, complaints and violations. Just wanted to emphasize and re-emphasize that both the Office of Law Enforcement, and I think I can speak for the office of General Counsel treats instances of observer harassment, interference, and assault, in the most serious manner. It is our highest priority and one of the highest priorities in this area as well as in all regions. We will continue to aggressively investigate and seek prosecution of those violations as well as retaliation for those observers or monitors who are reporting instances of harassment...” Jim Landon, new head of NOAA Office of Law Enforcement. Formerly Chief of the Law Enforcement section in the office of NOAA General Counsel.

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Observer Seminar Day

Researchers, observers and FSB staff members gathered at Observer Training Center in East Falmouth, MA on October 30th, 2015 for the first ever Observer Seminar Day, entitled "Seals and Fisheries."

The purpose of the Observer Seminar Day was to provide observers with an opportunity to learn more about a topic of interest and see how end users, researchers, and fellow observers use observer-related data and samples. It was a chance for observers to interact, learn and discuss topics of mutual interest in a casual, professional setting.

For this first seminar, Fisheries Sampling Branch partnered with NASRC (The North Atlantic Seal Research Consortium). The seminar focused on seals and seal-related issues. The talks presented during the day were drawn largely from recent meetings by NASRC and NEFSC.

Because of observers' work schedules, it is difficult for them to attend scientific seminars and meetings. We hope that by bringing a selected group of presenters together on a day that can fit into their work schedules, we can provide a unique opportunity for observers to interact with end users and researchers. This was our first seminar of this capacity, so we look forward to receiving suggestions for topics that could be the basis for future events.

List of speakers included:

- Andrea Bogomolni (WHOI) and Owen Nichols (Center for Coastal Studies)
- Fred Wenzel (NEFSC)—Long Term Study on the feeding ecology of Northeast U.S. Atlantic seals
- Josh Hatch (NEFSC)- Seal Depredation and Bycatch—NEFOP/ASM data analysis
- Laura Sirak (UNE) - Characterizing Bite Marks for the Identification of Depredation Sources in the NE sink-gillnet fishery
- Lauren Bamford (UNE)- Parasite/Pinniped Fishery Interaction –codworm in Gulf of Maine Cod
- Greg Skomal (MA Marine Fisheries) - Preliminary observations on habitat use, residency, and site fidelity of white sharks in Cape Cod coastal waters.
- Doug Brander (IFS, ASM-EWTS) - Captain Comment Cards

Observer of the Month (Winter)

October 2015: Ernest Jaramillo (J35)

Ernest has been ASM certified since May of 2010. He's taken over 130 gillnet trips, and nearly 100 trawl trips over the course of his career. Although he hasn't been taking many trips this summer/fall, the ones he has taken have been great. His uploads are always meticulously completed, and his paper logs are neat and many come in with no errors at all. He's always available by phone and is a pleasure to talk to, always friendly and open to answering questions. As an ASM he's been at the front lines of recent tensions and has maintained high data quality in the face of difficult working conditions.

November 2015: Jocelyn Lahey (M84)

Since completing ASM training, Jocelyn has completed 46 trips for a total of 118 sea days. A majority of her trips are in the Gulf of Maine, which has been a difficult area to observe lately. During this time, she has maintained high levels of data quality even through some unique and trying situations. Jocelyn recently took a difficult trip where enforcement had to become involved. Jocelyn's adherence to program protocols, going above and beyond to use the best estimation methods and effective communication gave those involved a high level of confidence in her work. Despite difficult situations such as this, it is evident that she works hard on deck while maintaining great relationships with captains and crew.

December 2015: Emma Fowler (M93)

Emma was certified as an ASM in August of 2014. Since her start, she has completed 74 trips with about 167 days at sea. She has achieved 100% for the species verification program three out of four quarters and a 96% for the other quarter. With every trip she has fewer errors and blanks. She has an enjoyable attitude and is a pleasure to talk with. She often calls ahead of an upload to talk about the trip. Debriefs go well and she is readily available. Strong dedication to the program.

Outreach Events

- January 21-24th—Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association's Annual Weekend and Industry Trade Show (Falmouth, MA)
 - March 3rd-5th —Maine Fishermen's Forum (Rockland, ME)
- April 27-28th , Commercial Marine Expo (New Bedford , MA)



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