

The Mexican Marine Sport Fisheries

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Sport fishing is a unique recreation. It offers excitement and personal satisfaction whether conducted from the seashore; at a mountain stream; or in the open ocean, fishing for marlin or sailfish. The Mexican sport fisheries are complex and varied. Studies are needed concerning their economic, social, and cultural aspects. Because the sport fisheries serve as a tourist attraction, they stimulate economic growth; they also create better understanding and cultural appreciation among individuals and nations.

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The purpose of this report is to present a preliminary survey of the sport fisheries of Mexico and the factors which affect them.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES INVOLVED WITH SPORT FISHERIES

Realizing the potential for development, the recently created Office of the Undersecretariat of Fisheries (Subsecretaria de Pesca) has established better mechanisms to promote sport fisheries. The Undersecretary has organized an Office of Sport Fisheries (Oficina de Pesca Deportiva) whose main function is to obtain sport fishing statistics from clubs, charter boats, tournaments, and all other businesses involved with sport fishing. This office operates under the Office of Fishery Regions (Direccion General de Regiones Pesqueras).

The National Institute of Fisheries (Instituto Nacional de Pesca) has ongoing biological studies which, in the

future, will provide additional information on sport fish species from all areas of Mexico. These studies will include seasonal occurrence, ecology, and life histories of sport fishes. We are also currently attempting to eliminate problems in the economics of sport fisheries. We believe that coordination of activities and ongoing biological and economic studies will provide the information necessary to accomplish this goal. Additionally, an attempt is being made to coordinate knowledge of sport fisheries to aid in economic planning of the industry. To further aid the industry the Mexican government has enacted legislation (Article 10 of the New Law for the Development of Fisheries) which protects certain species of fishes. It states:

"A fishery is considered a sport fishery when without purpose of gaining financial profit, it is conducted for the purpose of recreation and practiced with appropriate sport fishing equipment. Fish species



Figure 1.—There is excellent sport fishing on both coasts of Mexico. The waters of the north-west, particularly around Baja California, account for most sport fishing permits.

reserved exclusively for sport fishing are marlin, sailfish, tarpon, roosterfish, dolphin, and any other species designated by the National Institute of Fisheries."

BILLFISH RESOURCES AND AREAS OF FISHING

The eastern and western shores of Mexico are famous for the many sport fishing areas which have facilities providing sport fishing for the many fish species.

THE SPORT FISHES

Sailfish (pez vela, *Istiophorus platyterus*): Sailfish have been reported in the Pacific from Monterey, California, to Cape Blanco, Peru. In Mexico it is fished at La Paz (Baja California), Mazatlán (Sinaloa), and Acapulco (Guerrero) (Figure 1). In Mexico sailfish are commonly found off southern Baja California, in the Gulf of California, and southward to the Guatemalan border. Near Baja California, they most frequently occur in the areas off Buena Vista, Punta Colorado, San José del Cabo, and Punta de Lobos. Some sport fishermen have indicated

that sailfish are seasonally abundant off the coast of the state of Colima with Manzanillo as the center of abundance. In the area off Acapulco sailfish are caught throughout the year. The highest catches occur during the winter months. Off Mazatlán and farther north into the Gulf of California they occur in largest numbers from May to October.

Sailfish are also reported from the Caribbean and throughout the Gulf of Mexico, ranging from Brazil to Massachusetts. Occasionally they are caught off the state of Veracruz, especially near Tuxpan.

Striped marlin (marlin rayado, or agujon, *Tetrapterus audax*): Fishing for striped marlin is occasionally good off Acapulco, Zihuatanejo, and Cabo San Lucas. Fishing is especially good at Cabo San Lucas. There striped marlin are reported seasonally abundant from December to June although there are few recorded data. Striped marlin are also fished in waters off Guaymas (Sonora), Mazatlán, and Puerto Vallarta (Jalisco).

Black marlin (marlin negro, *Makaira indica*): Black marlin have been reported in southern Baja California, Guaymas, La Paz, Mazatlán, Puerto

Vallarta, and less frequently off Zihuatanejo and Acapulco. Little is known of catches by sport fishermen south of Acapulco and even less from the Gulf of Tehuantepec, for there is essentially no sport fishing in these southern areas.

Swordfish (Pez espada, *Xiphias gladius*): Swordfish arouses as much interest among sport fishermen as sailfish and marlin. They range extensively throughout temperate and subtropical waters and are fished in waters along the west coast of Mexico from the Gulf of California southward. Off Acapulco swordfish do not appear to be abundant. Unfortunately, the swordfish catch data are not reliable. Japanese commercial longline catch data indicate seasonal abundance of swordfish off central and southern Baja California during October-February.

OTHER SPORT FISH RESOURCES

Other sport species which are reported to be abundant in Mexican waters are the following: tarpon (sabalo, *Tarpon atlanticus*); tuna (atun, *Thunnus* spp.); skipjack tuna (barrilete, *Katsuwonus pelamis*); bonito (*Sarda* sp.); mackerels (makerala, *Scomber japonicus*, *S. scomber*); barracuda (*Sphyrna* sp.); wahoo (peto, *Acanthocybium solandri*); Bonefish (macabi, *Albula vulpes*); dolphin (dorado, *Coryphaena hippurus*); roosterfish (pez gallo, *Nematistius pectoralis*); totuava (totoaba, *Cyano-scion macdonaldi*); jacks (jureles, *Caranx* spp.); snappers (pargos, huachinangos, *Lutjanus* spp.); snook (robalos, *Centropomus* sp.); yellowtail (jurel, *Seriola dorsalis*); and black sea bass (mero, *Epinephelus* sp.).

Also reported as numerous are various species of sharks, of which the following would certainly be formidable game species: tiger shark (tiburón tigre, *Galeocerdo cuvieri*); great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*); great hammerhead shark (pez martillo, *Sphyrna mokarran*); shortfin mako

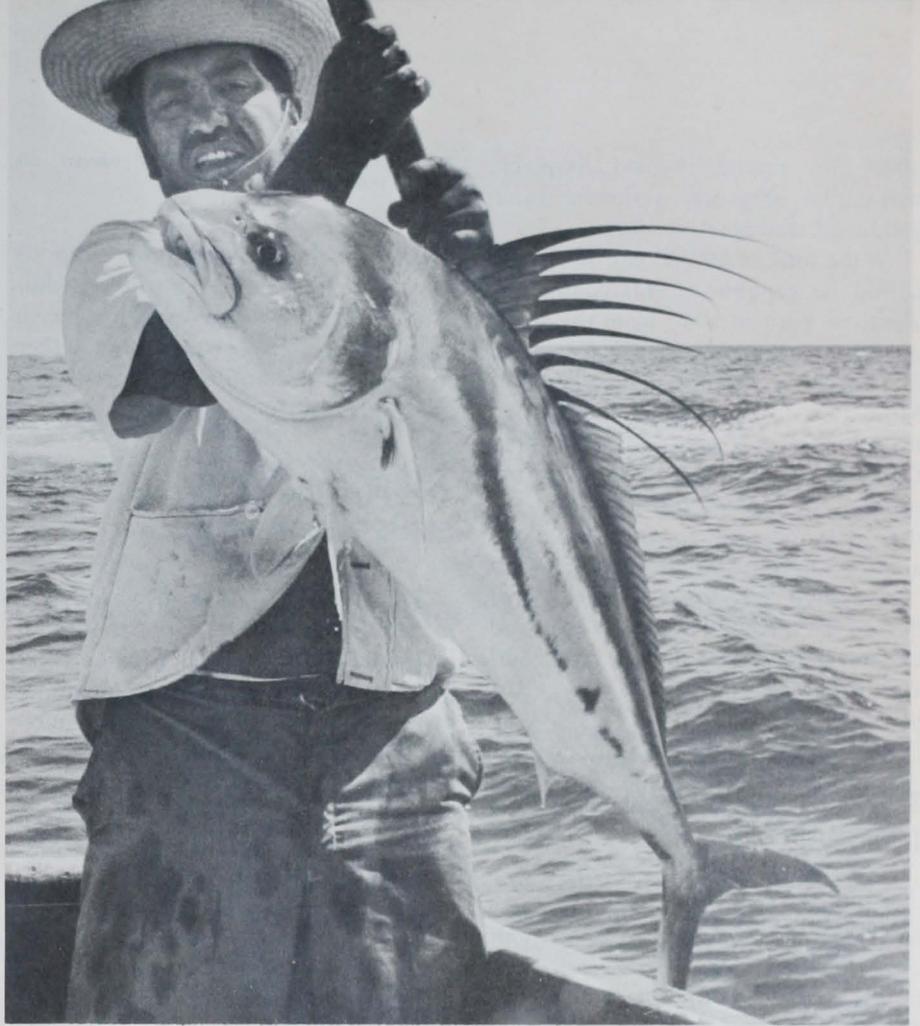
shark (tiburón paloma, *Isurus oxyrinchus*). Some of these sharks attain lengths of 15 to 20 feet.

THE SPORT FISHERIES

The marine sport fisheries can be classified in two categories:

- (1) the commercial sport fishery, using charter or "party" boats; and
- (2) fishing from private boats and from shore.

Within these categories 200,623 sport fishing permits were issued during 1971, of which 111,597 (56 percent) were issued in San Diego and San Pedro, Calif., mostly to party-boat fishermen. The areas fished by these partyboats are: Coronado Islands, Cedros and Benitos Islands, Guadalupe Island, Socorro Island, and localities near Ensenada and Cabo San Lucas. Most trips last from one to eight days. The species most sought



Right, landing a roosterfish; below, a view of part of the sport fishing charter fleet.



after are: marlin, bonito, skipjack, barracuda, albacore, yellowfin tuna, yellowtail, and black sea bass.

Of the total of 89,026 permits issued within the Republic of Mexico in 1971, about 62 percent were from the states of Baja California and Sonora, and the Territory of Baja California Sur. Most sport fishing permits were issued from offices in Ensenada, La Paz, and Guaymas. Thus, it can be seen that the waters of northwestern Mexico are the most popular to both Mexican and foreign sport fishermen.

Acapulco accounted for a total of 21,426 permits (24 percent) followed by Mazatlán with 3,304 (3.7 percent) and Puerto Vallarta with 707 (0.7 percent).

SPORT FISHING TOURNAMENTS

Throughout the year different sport fishing tournaments are held on both coasts. Some are internationally famous, such as those for tarpon at Tampico and Tuxpan, and for billfish at Guaymas, Mazatlán, Cabo San Lucas, and Acapulco. Some of these tournaments are organized through sport fishing clubs, and others by private individuals who promote such

The dolphin, or mahimahi, is caught off Mexico (right).

events for business purposes. Up to now there has not been a true coordination of these tournaments, nor have their results ever been evaluated, either in terms of promotional success or as sporting events.

THE FUTURE OF SPORT FISHERIES IN MEXICO

The growing sport fisheries will provide employment opportunities to help meet the needs of Mexico's expanding population. Proper planning, promotion, and regulation will maximize these opportunities. The newly enacted law recognizes the importance of sport fisheries, and by reserving certain species, will aid in the development of the industry.

Development of the sport fisheries is hampered by the lack of published information on distribution and abundance of species of fishes, and on the availability of facilities. Attempts are being made to consolidate such information and disseminate it through travel agencies and other avenues of contact with the sport fishing lovers of the world.



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