

Science Spends Time And Effort To Trace Bluefin

By DEVAN L. SHUMWAY
United Press International
SACRAMENTO (UPI) — It's getting so a fish can't have any privacy.

Marine Biologist C. E. Blunt Jr., is trying to answer a question for the ardent ocean fisherman about one of the peculiarities of the fish world — where the bluefin tuna go after their short yearly visits to California's shores.

It can be summed up this way: They really must travel!

"California bluefin travel our coast from Cape San Lucas, Baja, California, northward to Cape Flattery, Washington," said Blunt in a recent issue of a Fish and Game Department publication.

"The most productive areas are off Baja, California and Southern California. Sometimes catches are made at Guadalupe Island year around, but the first big runs usually develop off Baja, California, in April and May.

"By June bluefin generally show up along our south coast and fishing reaches its peak in July and August."

For the past three years, the anglers have been pulling them in by the thousands for some reason. Blunt said catches have been "exceptionally erratic."

The best year on record was 1956 when more than 35,000 of the fish were landed. Only six years before that, the best the sportsmen could do was 27 fish.

At the same time (in 1950) the commercial fishermen had a bad time of it, too. They reported one of the worst seasons on record, and landed only 1,423 tons of bluefin compared to a peak catch of 12,587 tons in 1935.

So Blunt poses a question: "Why such wide differences from year to year?"

He doesn't answer it: "The Department of Fish and Game is trying to find out what makes the bluefin behave so erratically."

Two sizes of the fish appear off the California coast. They average about 15 for one and 25 pounds for the other species. The 15-pounders behave themselves, and come back consistently, but the 25-pounders are only occasional guests.

California Department experts have unraveled parts of the mystery. They say that Guadalupe Island appears to be the year around playground for bluefin. Some in that area are more than six feet long and weigh 300 pounds. "Guadalupe's shores might well be the setting for a future world record," said Blunt.

The present International Game Fish Association all-tackle record for a sport-caught California Bluefin tuna is 251 pounds. This giant was captured off Santa Catalina Island in 1908.

A close relative of the California bluefin is the Atlantic bluefin, which reaches a weight of about 1,800 pounds.

There's another question puzzling biologists. That is the relationship of the California bluefin to similar tunas several thousand miles to the west.

Japanese fishermen catch bluefin tuna throughout much of the temperate Western Pacific and others have been taken in Hawaiian waters.

"Studies have shown that fish from both of these areas are remarkably similar to 'our' bluefin," said Blunt.

And here's another puzzler: No bluefin tuna of record taken along the California coast has contained maturing eggs.

And another: The larvae of bluefin tuna have yet to be found despite many searches during the past 10 years.

"This absence of spawning adults or larval fish suggests that California bluefin tuna are derived from fish living farther offshore," said the biologist.

It's no secret what the fish eat. Of 168 taken last year, 70 per cent had been feeding on anchovies. This would indicate, according to Blunt, that the bluefin can be influenced by how plentiful the local bait fish, especially anchovies, may be.

They sometimes feed close inshore near the surf and then they

eat starfish, kelp, sanddabs, surf perches and white croakers.

Blunt winds up like this:

"Before the mystery of this roving seasonably abundant fish can be solved, much more information is needed. Its food and spawning habits, travels, growth rate and preferred living conditions are still little known.

"Only when this is accomplished will we know to what extent our skyrocketing human population can depend upon this resource for food and recreation."

WELL NAMED

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (AP) — Staff members of the Natural History Museum during the last 45 years have included a Miss Peacock, Miss Woodcock, a Mr. Quail and a Mr. Gander. Only Gander survives.

REALLY OLD

MEDICINE HAT, Alta. (AP) — The complete fossil of a chasmosaurus, a dinosaur that roamed this south-east Alberta area 60 million years ago, was unearthed 10 miles south of Irvine and sent to the national museum at Ottawa.



ACCIDENTAL ART—If it were entitled "Still Life With Bird," this nature study of a fence post and waving wheat heads might receive a photographic salon award. But the photographer whose lens caught the artistic composition was merely snapping away to illustrate new slip-on fence fasteners nailed to the post.

BACKYARD STAGE
HOLLYWOOD (UPI) — Ernie Kovacs and his wife, Edie Adams, plan to have an outdoor theater as part of the new home they're building in Beverly Hills.

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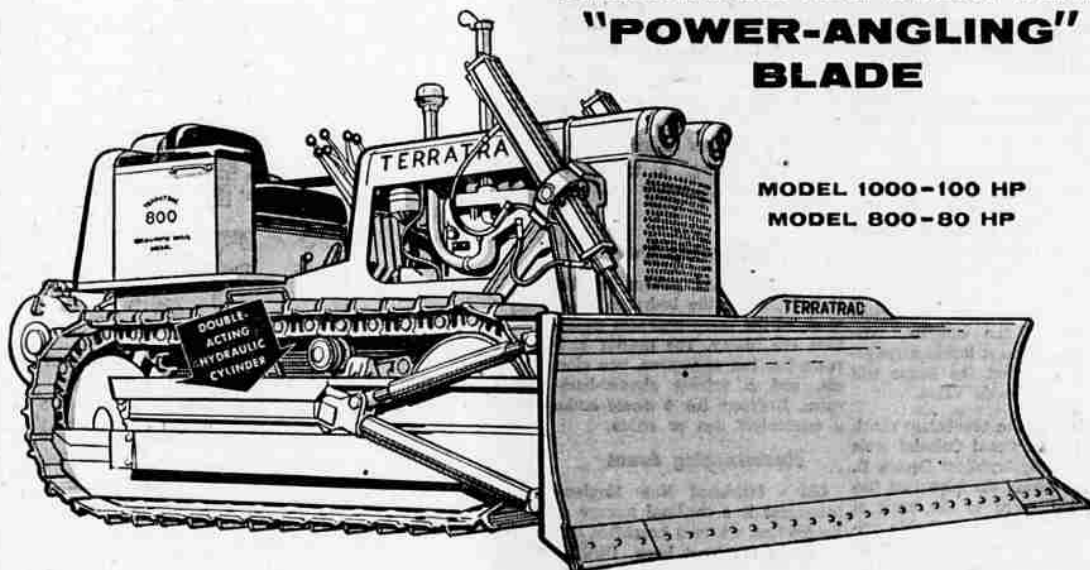
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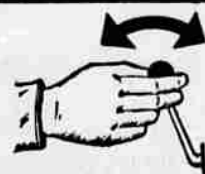


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