



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Anglers Earn Over 5000 Citations in 2011 for the 12th Year in a Row

Anglers registered 5176 trophy-size fish for Citation awards during the 54th Annual Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, which ran from January 1st through December 31st. This was the 12th year in a row anglers registered at least 5,000 Citations since the Tournament began in 1958.

Striped bass lead the Citation parade (44-inch for a release and 40 pounds for a kill) in 2011 with a total of 983 fish registered. This total included 256 fish (26 %) for release and 726 fish (74 %) for a kill, and accounted for 19 % of the year's total awards. The season total was the fourth highest number of striped bass awards in Tournament history. Seventy-four of the kill Citations were for fish 50 pounds or greater, 15 of these striped bass weighed 55 pounds or more and two topped the 60-pound mark. The fishery was largely fueled by near ideal conditions in December and the availability of trophy sized stripers in many locations throughout the Bay and even inside some tributaries. Numerous striped bass were recorded from the lower James River, above the James River Bridge, where trophy stripers have been rare in recent years.

Speckled trout accounted for the second largest number of Citations among the 35 eligible species in 2011 with a total of 948 awards with 692 (73%) releases and 256 (27%) kills. Trophy trout represented 18% of the year's awards. The 2011 total was the second highest in the Tournament's history, eclipsed only by the record setting total of 1056 Citation speckled trout registered in 2008. The Virginia's trophy speckled trout fishery is truly a year round fishery and Citation trout were registered in every month of the year in 2011. While the majority of speckled trout registered were released, of those that were killed, six topped the magic 10-pound mark and 49 fish weighed 8 pounds or more.

After back to back record setting numbers, white marlin Citations dropped in 2011, but only slightly, as offshore anglers registered 915 white marlin releases in 2011. This was the second highest number of white marlin awards in Tournament history and second only to the

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1253 releases registered in 2010. White marlin accounted for the third most Citations and 18% of all Citations registered in 2011. White marlin are only eligible for release so all of these beautiful billfish were released. The season's first white marlin was caught June 5 and the last three of the year were registered November 13. The marlin fishing was consistently good from mid-July through late September with break in late August due to hurricane Irene.

Red drum accounted for the fourth highest number of Citations in 2011, representing 15% of the year's total number. The 755 red drum Citations represent the third highest number of awards issued for the species in the Program's history. Red drum Citations became "release only" in 2000, and coincidentally, that was the first time in Tournament history more than 500 Citation red drum were registered in a single year. Since 2000 anglers have failed to register less than 500 reds in only two years, as management measures for the sought after red fish preclude the keeping of the large adult fish. The season for trophy-sized red drum is a long one in Virginia. The season's first red drum was caught on the off Smith Island on April 17 and the last three drum of the year were registered October 23. Two of those drum were caught in the vicinity of the CBBT complex and the other was pulled from the barrier island surf out of Oyster.

Several species deserve honorable mention in the 2011 review. Cobia made another good showing, although numbers of Citation fish were down slightly from 2010 with 262 of these brown suited fish registered in 2011. A full 27% were for released fish (minimum qualifying length is 50 inches) and some of the weight Citations were real brutes, topped by a 101-pound cobia. The season's first cobia was landed May 27, just in time for the long Memorial Day weekend while sight casting at the CBBT. The last cobia for the season was registered September 29 and was caught at the Chesapeake Light Tower. Cobia accounted for 5 % of all Citations issued in 2010. Blueline tilefish numbers reached their second highest total since these deepwater dwelling fish were added to the eligible species list in 2007, as 241 bluelines (10-pound minimum weight) were checked in during 2011. Tilefish accounted for 5% of all Citations registered in 2011. Due to the deepwater habitat preferred by these fish and the huge pressure change the fish are subject to as they are pulled to the surface, no release Citation is offered for tilefish. Sheepshead numbers were solid and on par with 2010, as the season produced 206 trophy fish or 4% of the year's total.

As the tide rose for several species in 2011, others saw their numbers ebb. The number of spadefish registered in 2011 was the lowest total since this species was added to the Citation program in 1995, as a mere 8 Citations were registered. Flounder Citation numbers dropped for the seventh year in a row, to just 197 fish. Although 23 of the flounder Citations were for doormat flounder of 10 pounds or more, this was the only year since 1995 anglers failed to register at least 200 trophy flatfish. Gray trout numbers, and not just trophy-sized fish, have been disturbingly low since 2005 and 2011 saw a continuation of that trend. Spot Citation numbers took an inexplicable nose-dive in 2007 and remained low in 2011, as just 6 spot were registered for the season. The "biggest loser" in 2011 in terms of total numbers was amberjack as just 21 jacks were registered during the year. This was the lowest number of "AJs" registered since a release was added to the format in 1988. Reports indicated amberjack were readily available at the "Southern Towers," located some 50 miles SE of Rudee Inlet, but few of these willing gamesters met the release Citation minimum of 50 inches.

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament is operated by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission with funding provided by the Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Fund. Awards are made to anglers catching fish meeting established weight criteria in 25 species while an additional 10 species meeting established length criteria are only available for release awards for a total of 35 species eligible for Citation recognition.

Citation awards are full color certificates delivered at the recipient's choice as a plaque or in a plastic album page. Special awards are presented to anglers meeting the eligibility requirements of the Master Angler and Expert Angler programs. The Program also administers the very popular Virginia Junior Angler award program, where any angler 15 years of age and younger can earn a special Virginia Junior Angler Award certificate by catching and releasing 6 different species of saltwater fish in Virginia during a calendar year.

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