



Word on the Waves

a publication of the Fisheries Observation Science Program at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center

Observer Spotlight:

Jose Menedez-Aponte

Observing since 2015
Currently stationed in Astoria, OR

Best friends get us into things, like adventures and predicaments. In the case of Jose Menedez-Aponte, his best friend got him into observing.

A native Floridian, Jose graduated from Florida International University in Miami. A chance conversation with his best friend, a former observer, led Jose to seek out the profession. He joined AOI's observer roster in 2015.

Jose loves the ocean and enjoys being at sea. Although he jokingly refers to himself as a "fish counter," he's passionate about fisheries conservation. It's his dream job. He names seeing the wildlife as his favorite part of the job.



Jose's already developed a preference for mid-water rockfishing citing the short trips and low levels of discard as its selling points. He hates discarding fish. He names the common Snook, (*Centropomus undecimalis*) as his current favorite fish.

When not at sea, Jose enjoys spending time with family, friends and his dog Max. He's an active outdoors man and can be found surfing, snorkeling, and fishing in his spare time. He loves to travel and dreams of traveling to warm water locations around the world.

We're extremely glad to have Jose with us. We mean that literally. He was observing on the *Capt. John* when it sank in February. We're thankful he and the crew are safe. You can read Jose's account of the experience on Page 5.

Jose, thank you for your enthusiasm, diligence and ongoing efforts. They are greatly appreciated.



From the Program

Greetings Observers,

First, I want to say how incredibly grateful I am that Jose and the crew of the *Capt. John* are physically unscathed from their disaster at-sea. To have everyone make it back to shore safe and uninjured is a blessing. We're incredibly lucky to have such a capable US Coast Guard and fishing fleet and they were once again instrumental in helping those in distress. As a program, we'll be learning as much as we can from this event. Its valuable lessons can help us increase the efficacy and quality of our safety trainings and policies.

I also want to mention the upcoming 8th International Fisheries Observer and Monitoring Conference (IFOMC) being held this August in San Diego, CA. Final dates are August 29th to September 2nd. A specific location should be announced soon.

This conference is a fantastic opportunity to learn and share experiences with others from around the world who work in fisheries observing and monitoring. The IFOMC is a one-of-a-kind experience that brings so many countries together and focuses on the work so many of us are passionate about. It's only in the United States every five years or so. We're lucky to have it on our own coast this year, I strongly recommend taking advantage of this opportunity.

We'll share conference details as soon as they're available, including any volunteer opportunities or financial assistance programs for observers. You can find information about the conference events and themes on the [IFOMC's](#) website.

As always, stay safe.



Reflections on the Winter Hake Spawning Survey

Jenni Hood, At-Sea Hake Observer

I'm so thankful I had the opportunity to volunteer as a wet lab scientist aboard the *Bell M. Shimada*. The 209-foot NOAA research vessel was used for the very first Winter Hake Spawning Survey. Our mission was to discover where adult hake go during their spawning period.

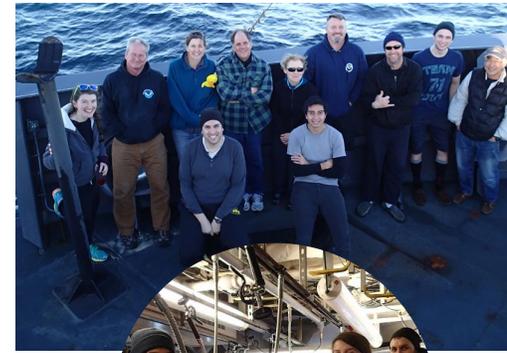
During the 30-day survey, we collected 5,300 nautical miles of acoustic data, completed 32 midwater trawls, did 75 CTD casts, 25 zooplankton vertical net casts and over 2,000 minutes of observations for marine mammals and seabirds. We also collected specimens for University of Washington's Fish Collection and over 3,000 samples of Harmful Algal Blooms along the coast.

Having spent the last three years working as a groundfish observer along the west coast and Bering Sea, I'm accustomed to being at sea. This trip was vastly different from my previous experience. I regularly work alone on commercial fishing vessels. Being aboard the *Shimada* as part of a team of very skilled scientists was a welcomed change. In the two weeks I spent with them, I learned a lot of useful skills, such as reading acoustic data, working transect lines at sea, and performing zooplankton tows.

I found the pace aboard the research vessel very different. In the wet lab, we had lots of time to process the fish, show each other helpful characteristics and techniques for identification, and learn how to use the computer programs that track every measurement, weight and sample (like stomach content, otolith or genetic collection) of the target species.

As the survey came to an end, I was sad to leave such a great group of scientists and crew. It was refreshing to witness a diverse group of people coming together and efficiently working towards a common goal. I'm lucky to have met such wonderful people. Thanks to Cassandra Donovan for putting me in touch with the team and thank you to Chief Scientist Sandy Parker-Stetter for working with my schedule to get me aboard.

For more information on the survey, check out the [Winter Hake Blog](#).



Fisheries News

NOAA recently released the final [Action Plan for Fish Release Mortality Science](#) which identifies 10 actions designed to facilitate better science and management protocols that take the fate of bycatch into consideration.

The [Institute for Fishing Resources](#) is a California-based nonprofit organization supported by industry. It performs its own research and conservation efforts. It's worth following.

NOAA announced a new assessment indicating US fishery management exceeds standards for sustainability. [Here's the full review.](#)

NPR spotlighted "[The effect of rights-based fisheries management on risk taking and fishing safety](#)," written by Seattle-based NWFSC economist, Lisa Pfeiffer. Lisa's paper discloses the effect catch share programs have on fishers' safety. She used data from the West coast sable fishery to do her research. Click [here](#) to view the NPR article.

And finally, the latest edition of the [National Bycatch Report](#) is available. Many of our staff were directly involved with this update and the entire program - staff and observers - contribute to its success.



The captain and crew of the *Moriah Lee*, Half Moon Bay, CA. Photo courtesy of Ethan Righter.



From the Galley

John LaFargue, CA Coordinator

Spring is starting to show here in California and many of us are dreaming of dusting off our neglected fishing tackle. Sport salmon and halibut season are right around the corner, but what really gets me excited is white seabass.

White seabass are a croaker...a croaker that can grow over 75lbs. And like many croakers they are utterly delicious! They have a cult-like following among anglers. When they are biting everything else takes a back seat.

White seabass have a firm, white meat with large myomeres and a mild, but pleasing, flavor. You can substitute them in for any firm, white meat fish.

If you happen to find yourself in central or southern California (like for the International Fisheries Observing and Monitoring Conference), you might look into picking up a fillet or, even better, try catching or spearing one yourself.

They're found close to shore in the kelp and are a popular target for free divers and kayak anglers. Many observers, past and present, as well as staff have targeted them. Better seafood restaurants will occasionally feature them on their specials boards. I've seen it several times on menus as far north as Portland, OR.

The large firm fillets lend themselves to any type of cooking: frying, broiling, baking. It makes amazing fish and chips, but how much fried fish can you really eat? Don't answer that.



One of my healthier go-to seabass entrées is roasted fish, greens and citrus. Shoot, I think that might even be Paleo! It's as simple as wrapping cooked greens, fish and citrus slices in parchment paper and roasting them until done. It can be

*James Grunden, AOI observer
stationed in Ventura*

as fancy or simple as you like. If you don't have parchment paper you can always use foil. Remember the "Hobo packs" dad use to burn in the campfire? Same idea - without the burning.

Fish in parchment

1/2lb fish of your choice
Citrus of your choice
1 bunch of chard or kale
Salt and pepper
Olive oil



Directions

Preheat oven to 400F.

Pull chard or kale off the stem. Blanch in salted water until just tender.

Thinly slice citrus while the greens are blanching. I used a mix since I had them on hand, but use whatever looks good.

Place drained greens on a sheet of parchment paper or foil. I usually add a little lemon juice and cracked pepper.

Place fish on top of greens, drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Always good to season as you go.

Place citrus slices on top of fish overlapping them so they are about the size of the fillet.

Bring the two long sides of paper/foil up around the fish and roll or fold to secure. Do the same with each end.

Bake approximately 20 minutes on a cookie sheet. If your fish is really thick, check that it's cooked to your liking.



Spinyfin Sighting

Jeff Mathers, AOI Observer • Stationed in Astoria

The most exciting parts of observing is when the catch is brought up. What's in the net? Most of the time, it's fairly predictable. Occasionally, there's something unexpected. There's also the possibility that a rare or never-before-seen species will be in the net. As a new observer, I got lucky. On the second trip of my observing career, one of these rare encounters occurred.

On March 7, 2015, I'd been at sea for nearly four days. The vessel I was on was fishing for Dover Sole in 240 fathoms of water near my home port of Astoria, OR. The species composition was routine for this time of year: lots of Dover Sole, some Arrowtooth Flounder and Sablefish, some Tanner Crabs, Catsharks, Eelpouts, and of course a hefty share of MUD! Having completed nine tows, the crew was working on number ten, when out of the pile of sloshing Dover on deck, something different floated to the surface. It was a 29 cm, 1.3lbs, *Diretmichthys parini* or Parin's Spinyfin.



Spinyfin fish are a laterally compressed, oval bodied fish, whose normal range is restricted to tropical water latitudes, with the occasional wanderer to temperate waters. They've been recorded in the Pacific from Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Norfolk Island, Papua New Guinea, the Hawaiian Islands and the central equatorial region off of Peru and Chile (Pequeño and Olivera 2004), but not from the central North Pacific Ocean (Moore in press, Mundy 2005)¹. According to Eschmeyer et al. 1983, Spinyfin fish are known in the Oregon/Washington area from only a single specimen trawled off Washington at about 650 ft. (198 m, 108ftm)².

This was an unusual encounter!

It's difficult to know what caused this particular fish to stray so far from its typical range. Was it due to an overall increase in ocean temperatures associated with global warming? The unusually warm waters observed in 2015 known as the Pacific Ocean Blob? Or did a strange current carry it to this region of the Pacific? These answers may never come. However, with these unusual ocean patterns and the current strong El Niño event, the opportunity for such unusual observations persists. So observers, keep a lookout each time catch is brought up from the depths below! You may have the good luck to see something rare.

Citations

1. Iwamoto, T. 2015. *Diretmichthys parini*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2015*: e.T190137A21910485. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2015-4.RLTS.T190137A21910485.en>. Downloaded on 08 February 2016.

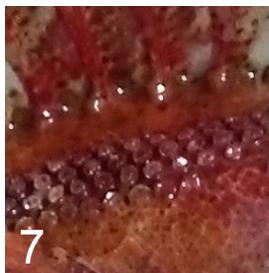
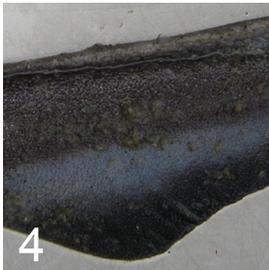
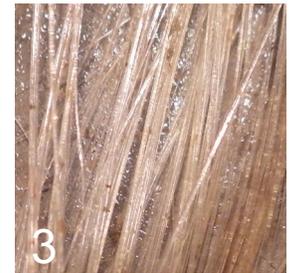
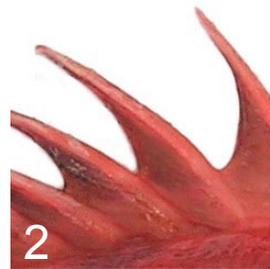
2. Eschmeyer, W. 1983. *Pacific Coast Fishes*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Name the Mystery Creature

The game continues! Here's the next set of mystery creatures. Can you name all nine correctly? The answers are below.

Enjoy!

Many thanks to debriefer Toby Mitchell for crafting the images for this challenge.



Answers: 1-Brownbox Crab; 2-Cowcod; 3-Fiber Optic Sponge; 4-Filetail Catshark; 5-Isopod; 6-Rabbit-eared Salp; 7-Red Irish Sculpin; 8-Sandsole; 9-Sevendill Shark

Capture the moment!

Please remember to use your camera to document unusual species. Not only is it precious data, but it also allows us to share your finds with the Program and your fellow observers.



The Sinking of the Capt. John

Jose Menendez-Aponte, AOI Observer • stationed in Astoria

Jose was observing on the Capt. John when it went down. . Here's his eyewitness account.

Around 1230, the *Capt. John* had approximately 60,000 lbs. on board. I was told the lazarette had more water in it than usual, but it seemed manageable; the engine room wasn't taking on water. A deckhand tightened the leaking rudder post and that seemed to help the situation.

At 1300, I went to my bunk to take a nap. Five minutes later, the captain woke me and told me to bring the immersion suits to the wheelhouse. We were sinking.

When I arrived at the wheelhouse, the captain was communicating with the Coast Guard on the radio. The back deck went under water every time a wave broke. The crew

and I got the life raft off the wheelhouse roof. The captain instructed us to don our immersion suits. In the meantime, the lazarette continued filling with water.

Five minutes later, the boat began to list heavily on its starboard side. We tied off the life raft, deployed it off the bow port side and climbed over the railing. Moments later the boat rolled completely. We jumped in the water and swam towards the life raft.

The Coast Guard helicopter was there when the boat rolled. Their rescue swimmer was in the water and to the life raft shortly after we reached it. Ten minutes later the Coast Guard boat arrived and began pulling us out of the water.



Data Finalization: Making Progress

Ryan Shama, Lead Debriefer. • Stationed in Newport

This marks the third year in a row that we've closed out all WCGOP data ahead of schedule. But that's not all. Check out this figure showing our data finalization record for the Catch Share program, since it started in 2011. In particular, take a look at the "Average Days to Final" column. This is the average number of days, after which, there were no more edits made to discard estimates. Observer errors are being identified and addressed faster with each passing year. At this point, there is very little room for improvement.

Year	Total Trips for Year	Average Days To Final	Standard Deviation	Percent Trips Finalized by Day 15	Percent Trips with Modified Discard
2011	1586	51.94	59.95	36.13	29.57
2012	1375	59.41	74.05	44.29	38.47
2013	1486	19.31	27.13	76.65	36.2
2014	1539	11.21	17.35	90.51	28.14
2015	1023	8.98	15.47	93.55	34.9
2016	66	4.85	4.38	95.45	21.21

Additionally, we have seen steady improvements in in the time it takes for observers to enter Catch Share trips into the WC-GOP database. The numbers speak for themselves!

Year	Total Trips for Year	Average Days to Enter Year	Standard Deviation	Percent Trips Entered by Day 15
2011	1586	6.94	11.35	89.72
2012	1375	5.96	12.09	87.2
2013	1486	4.02	4.54	95.69
2014	1539	3.58	4.28	96.62
2015	1023	2.55	5	97.07
2016	66	2.61	3.27	96.97