

Fishing & Hunting



By Richard Seale

Difficult issues—from tuna to bears

The annual auctions of blue fin tuna have started at Tokyo's Tsukiji Fish Market. The first fish auctioned is supposed to bring the purchaser good business luck in the coming year. For the fifth year in a row the owner of the Sushi Zanmai restaurant chain, Kiyoshi Kimura, won the first bid. He paid the yen equivalent of \$117,283 for the 440-pound tuna, or \$266.55 per pound. At the opening of the 2013 tuna auctions, Kiyoshi Kimura paid \$1,700,000 for a 489-pound fish, the standing record by far at a cool \$3,476.48 a pound. I can understand why that record is holding up.

Near Cape Lookout and Shackleford Banks there is an Atlantic blue fin tuna fishery that happens in late December through most of January in most years. This fishery draws commercial boats from Florida to New York to Morehead City docks. Fish landed are brokered through Portside Marina. They are tested there for meat chemistry, bid on, shipped in special containers to Raleigh-Durham Airport and air freighted to Tokyo to be sold at the next Tsukiji Fish Market auction. At Portside, historical prices have run from \$8 to \$22 a pound, a long way from what is being realized at the Tokyo auctions. Nonetheless, a 400-pound fish at even \$10 a pound is a nice \$4,000 bonus for a lucky boatload of fishermen. I contend that the only real winners are the Japanese marketers and restaurateurs.

I participated in this fishery for a few years and actually got to sell a fish. However, I quickly learned that the 4 a.m. January trips into a dark ocean can be very dangerous and very unrewarding to the majority of fishermen who partake of this adventure. Up to 130 boats head out, and seldom do more than a few come home with fish. My business sense tells me the fleet cost per pound is many times the revenue realized. Each year there are injuries, and sometimes deaths, due to 400-plus-pound fish dragging lines out at incredible speeds, or snarling fisherman in lines.

Besides being a poor business "deal," the preponderance of scientific evidence is that the blue fin tuna is headed for extinction at the current rates of harvest. The blue fin tuna that migrate past our local coastline were born in the Mediterranean Sea. After growing up a bit in that body of water, they migrate out via Gibraltar and make a huge semi-circle past England, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland and Labrador. They then migrate past New England, down to North Carolina, then on to the Caribbean, back across the Atlantic Ocean and, finally, back into the Mediterranean to spawn and start the cycle over again.

Obviously, keeping track of such pelagic and migratory fish is very difficult and expensive. Barbara Block, from Stanford's Hopkins Marine Institute, has come to the Duke Marine Lab on Pivers Island during the NC blue fin tuna season for several years to catch and radio tag several fish. Though of some value, the data collected has not been extensive. The statistics can only provide rough trends. But these do indicate the species is not on a sustainable harvest fishery management plan. In short, money is driving this fishery, not science. This is, most assuredly, a difficult issue to get hold of.

And on to bears. My granddaughter Megan decided she wanted to harvest a bear. My son Roger took her to Hyde County the Wednesday before Christmas to try to let her do that. They did not get to the stand until quite late in the day. Roger was busy setting up the rifle, binoculars and range finder on the shooting rails when Megan taped him on the shoulder and whispered, "Dad, there's a deer out there. Why don't you shoot it?" Roger replied, "No, we came here so you



Tuna auction at the Tsukiji Fish Market in Tokyo—Photo by Derek Mawhinney, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

could try for a bear." Just as he finished his set-up work, out stepped a bear—not a huge one, but one in the 200-pound range. He scrambled to view and range the bear, and to get a shell in the rifle. Both put on hearing protection and Megan set herself up to shoot. Once she said she had the bear in the cross hairs, Roger asked her, "Megan, you sure you want to do this?" She answered, "Yes." He pushed the safety off, kept the bear in his binocular view, and said, "Any time you are ready to pull the trigger, do it." She pulled the trigger.

Roger thought he saw the bear respond to a shot in its shoulder, right in the right spot. The bear did not drop, but ran off into the woods. Roger said, "Great shot. Now we just wait for 20 minutes to let the bear die. We do not stumble into an angry bear! It should not go far with that shot." When they started their search, it was getting pretty dark. It was raining hard and they could not find a blood trail.

Hyde County brambles and underbrush make trailing anything difficult, even in daylight and dry conditions. Roger did follow a trail of disturbed vegetation to where it crossed a watery ditch. It was evident the bear had crossed there, but the trail petered out once across the ditch. After an hour and half of searching, they were forced to admit they could not find the bear. It was one of the warm nights. If, indeed, the bear was hit and did die, both knew it would not be any good the next day. It was a difficult decision to call off the search and for Megan to come to terms with the fact that her first shot at a bear was not a successful one, for reasons unknown.

Most hunters have to face this difficult issue at some time during their hunting careers. It is always disturbing because, in our minds, we will replay again and again, "What did I do wrong?", "What could I have differently?", "I hope I really missed the animal!" and "I hope the animal is not suffering." Megan has worked through these issues. She has since gone out target shooting. She is a very good shot, and has said she wants to try again next bear season. She just turned 14 on January 2—and so it goes with growing up and learning how to deal with difficult issues.

This Month's Puzzle Solutions

8	5	3	4	1	7	9	2	6
2	1	7	3	6	9	4	8	5
4	9	6	8	2	5	7	3	1
6	4	2	9	7	3	5	1	8
9	7	5	2	8	1	6	4	3
1	3	8	5	4	6	2	9	7
3	2	9	7	5	8	1	6	4
5	8	1	6	9	4	3	7	2
7	6	4	1	3	2	8	5	9

A	M	A	S	S	A	L	U	M	P	E	L	T			
C	O	U	P	E	W	A	N	E	E	M	I	R			
M	O	N	U	M	E	N	T	A	L	R	I	C	E		
E	S	T	E	E	M	H	I	T	S	T	I	E			
					N	U	K	E	D	G	I	S	T	S	
J	E	E	R		E	R	E	B	U	S					
E	A	G	E	R	L	Y		D	A	S	T	A	R	D	
D	R	O	G	U	E				S	T	E	R	E	O	
I	N	S	U	R	E	D		L	E	O	N	I	N	E	
					L	A	R	Y	N	X		T	A	T	S
U	S	U	A	L		N	E	X	U	S					
P	E	N	T		T	A	U		R	A	V	I	S	H	
L	I	I	I		O	S	T	E	N	S	I	B	L	E	
I	N	T	O		I	T	E	M		S	C	I	O	N	
T	E	E	N		L	Y	R	E		Y	E	S	E	S	