

Appendix A. Basic Tagging Instructions and Tips

1. **Have tags organized before beginning to fish**, along with tagging data forms, tag applicator, measuring tape, and tagging assistant (if have one) to avoid mix-ups in recording tag #'s. **Incorrect Tag #'s can make your data unusable.**
2. **Handle fish with wet gloves or cloth** when removing hook, measuring fish, and inserting tag. With “green” fish, especially larger fish, **quiet the fish** down by covering its eyes with a wet cloth.
3. **Measure fish** on measuring board or horizontal tape, preferably with head pressed gently against perpendicular surface (measuring board preferred). Call out total length, fork length (if tail forked), and tag # to data recorder, or record yourself.
4. **Do not insert tag too far below dorsal fin**, or push tag completely through fish. Insert tag in muscle tissue below base of dorsal fin so that tag anchors between bony supports of the dorsal spines (see diagrams below).
5. **Two different tagging areas** are recommended (except for flounder), depending on whether fish is “smaller” (approx. <16-18 in.), or “larger” in size. **“Larger” fish have wider gaps** between forward-most dorsal spine supports, compared to “smaller” fish. Given T-Bar and Small Dart tag size, tagging a large fish closer toward the head may result in tags working back out from between the thicker and somewhat wider-spaced spine supports (then falling out of fish). Therefore, **tag “larger” fish farther back from head (as shown on other side)**, where fin ray supports are not so thick and close together. **Tag smaller fish in more forward area.**
6. **Insert tag gun needle firmly into muscle** approximately perpendicular to base of dorsal fin, angling tag slightly backward along contour of fish’s back as you insert it. Squeeze gun handle slowly, pushing tag down needle and into tissue with **very firm grip on gun**. **Muscle and bony spine supports will offer resistance to tag entering fish**, resulting in “back pressure” tending to push tag needle back out of muscle and dorsal spine area. **Maintain tag needle’s position until gun’s trigger is completely compressed into handle**, otherwise tag will not anchor securely.
7. Try to **feel tag anchor “click” past the bony spine supports**, the desired depth of penetration is achieved. **This may not be as noticeable in flounder** where one must place **T-Bar tag** in thicker muscle near tail end of dorsal fin (try to anchor tag in outer edge of flounder’s “backbone” spines; **must not penetrate spinal cord**). **If using dart tags** (not in flounder), turn tag barb slightly downward and towards fin base, then push into tissue with tag applicator (see diagram).
8. **Twist tag applicator** (about ¼-½ turn) and gently pull it out of the fish, leaving tag anchored in place. Gently pull on tag to ensure firmly anchored behind dorsal spine supports.
9. **If tag pulls loose** from spine supports, but is still under the skin, **try pushing it (while turning it slightly) back in** firmly with your fingers to work it past dorsal spine supports (this often works). **If tag pulls completely out** of muscle and is only just under the skin, pull out and discard tag (note your discarded tag # on data form). Retag fish with another tag. **If you feel fish is becoming overly stressed**, simply release the fish without a tag, then tag the next one.
10. **Before releasing fish, quickly again check tag #** to ensure recorded correctly (call it out again, if have helper), and gently release fish head first into water. **If fish appears weak or stunned**, support fish in hands while working it easily back and forth through the water to aerate gills. Release when tail movements get stronger. **If fish floats away** on its side/back and does not quickly swim normally, note this on data form.

Tag inserted into fish musculature just below dorsal fin with tag barb anchored through bony fin ray supports.

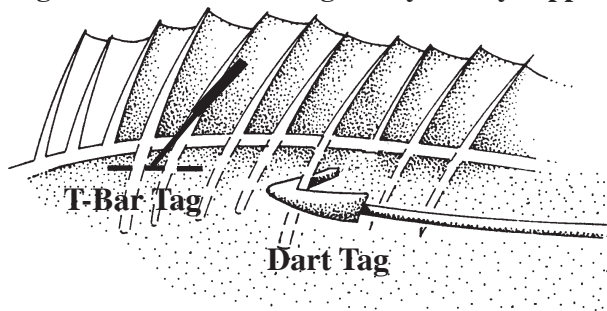
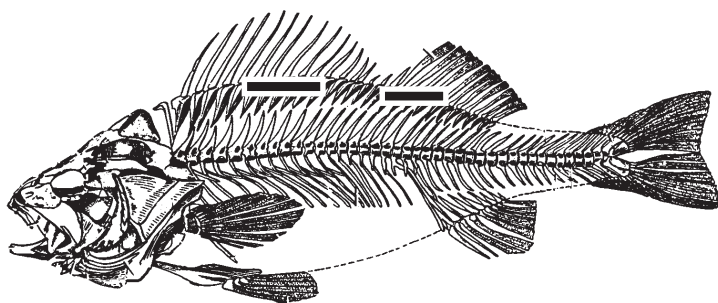


Diagram from *Game Fish Tag & Release: A Complete Guide to Tag and Release Techniques and Programs*, by Captain Al Anderson, 1995. Published by The Fisherman Library, 1620 Beaver Dam Road, Point Pleasant, NJ 08742. (The illustration is copyrighted. It is reproduced here with permission from the author and publisher.)