

Sunday, April 10. Day 9 at Sea - by Dr. Wise

It was to be a second day of breathtaking whales near the boat. The morning began with a pair of fin whales spotted early. We pursued our normal strategy and after some time caught up with them. The water was clear and we could see these wonderful creatures quite well through the water. Soon we had one whale on our port side and one whale on our starboard side.

Moments like these are quite challenging to our biopsiers. It's easy to get caught in an uncertain pickle of deciding which whale to try to sample first for one moment the left one is close and the next the right one is close. In addition, you have such a clear view of the whales, it's hard not to just sit back in amazement and enjoy the fantastic site of such amazing animals. But, at the same time, there is a job to do and samples to get to help protect both these whales and ourselves by learning the extent and problem of marine pollution. So while it would be nice to just ooh and aah, a sample must be obtained.

Fortunately, Rick and Johnny are experience biopsiers and they trust my judgment. We cruised through the water with these two whales popping up for breath and swimming alongside. Mark called down the location and status of each whale from above.

Johnny asked "which whale"?

I said "This one on starboard. Focus on this one"

They raised their bows.

Someone asked – "what about the other whale"

I said "just focus on this whale"

My mind hearkened back to the original Star Wars movie. The rebels were attacking the death star and the fighter pilots were asking questions. The flight leader's response was clear and repetitive "Stay on target, Stay on target". It's funny where your mind goes sometimes. My eyes were enjoying whales. My words were focusing biopsiers, but my head ended up remembering Star Wars. Ah well, I guess it's always a good time to remember Star Wars.

The whale cruised just underwater giving us a fantastic view. Fin whales as such sleek and long whales. It was pure eye candy for the kid in each of us.

The whale surfaced. Wow! What a spectacular animal!!! The arrows released and we had our sample. A job well done. The biopsiers shifted to port and soon we had sampled the other fin whale as well.

We didn't see any other whales for a while. Well, this might have been the most fun whale of the trip!

The afternoon found us with another humpback whale on our starboard side. It was smaller than the one the previous day, but still just as close to the boat. The whale was maybe 10 feet from the boat! It also had magnificent bright white gigantic pectoral fins that gave us a glowing trail to follow in the water. But this whale, wanted to play with the boat! It. He then went under the boat and came up the other side. Then crossed in front and back again. Soon the whale was in front riding our bow under water. Back and forth that whale soared in the water.

Wow! Wow! What a magnificent whale! How graceful and stunning. We all watched with glee as the whale danced around us. Back and forth, round and round like an underwater ballet. What a marvelous creature. We were enthralled by its majesty and grace.

After it finally surfaced and the dance was over, we took a biopsy. Our total is now 23 whales biopsied, from 5 different species - a hugely successful trip!

I have attached pictures of the amazing colors in the cliffs around us. Then I have attached a series of photos taken with the lab camera showing you a fin whale up close and personal. If you could look at them quickly in sequence you could see the whale surfacing almost as a video.

John













