

## Friday, April 8 – Flying Rays – Johnny Wise

Another largely uneventful day. While each of us rotated for helm and whale watches, the rest of the crew did their chores and individual boat fitness. We spent most of the day passing through a channel that was 3-4 miles across and a couple hundred meters deep. The end of the channel was marked by an island in the middle that looked like my kind of playground! Hopefully someday in the future I can make use of it...

Just before the dinner bell, Mark and Carlos reported seeing a couple blows – very close to the shore. As we made our way toward the first one, Oona pointed out there were a lot of rocks between us and the whale – and the whale was in very shallow water. To the second whale instead! This one turned out to be a humpback. We tracked it for several dives, then news came in that the third whale was approaching our direction – and it was a blue! The decision was made to head over to that one, as it was also closer to our anchor point and daylight was running out.

En route to the blue whale, we passed through a school of jumping fish – there were several schools of them jumping in every direction, so much so that it was a little distracting from spotting the whales. As we got closer we recognized they weren't ordinary fish – they were mobius rays! In the spring, these rays jump out of the water and slap their bodies on the surface to impress potential mates. And when I say they're jumping out of the water, I don't mean a simple flop above the surface – these rays are clearing the surface by 6 or 7 ft, and flapping their wings a few times before splashing back into the blue! The spectacle was a mixture of comic delight and awe. Watching them flap their wings in what looks like an attempt to fly, only to succumb to gravity in a futile splash is one thing – seeing hundreds of rays doing this all together makes for an oceanic comedy skit. As we sailed through one of the schools, where it seemed somewhere between 7 and 10 rays were jumping, we were given a peak at the grand spectacle that was really going on – those 7 or 10 rays were just a few of hundreds in a single school, and there were dozens of schools jumping in every direction as far as our eyes could see!

Either due to our preoccupations with the rays, or due to the rate with which the blue whale was travelling, the whale was lost to us, and we anchored near Monserrate Island, next to Sn Cosme Rock and Sn Damien Rock – no samples today, but one grand spectacle of nature's beauty in its bizarre performances of love and sex.

Johnny



















