

Day 28: July 5, 2011

Our first day without whales early. After no samples yesterday, we were a bit worried.

Mid-morning, Johnny called for a Sargasso weed sample. It is in the weed where we find the krill. We toss a casting net into the weed and then sort out the krill and put the weed back save for a small sample for testing. Johnny seems to take particular pleasure at casting the net, which is done kind of like a spin for a discus toss. I was pleasantly surprised to see Cathy tossing the net (picture attached; you can also see one of our buoys at her feet) as I like my team to be cross-trained and no one had done this task before. Johnny was cross-training even his favorite tasks, which is as it should be. Cathy found the job not so easy as it takes quite a bit of arm strength to haul it in once you net the Sargasso weed.

About lunch I called whales and we had a biopsy by 12:15 pm. A bit of a relief to have one to start. It became quiet again though and we were unsure how the rest of the day would go.

About 2 pm, Johnny called whales again and the team scrambled into place. I went out on deck shortly after and was surprised to find no one atop the pilot house spotting whales. Attributing it to seasickness, I took the watch and started spotting whales. What a serendipitous decision, for the whales Johnny saw were performing full breaches and lobtailing. Lobtailing is when a whale slams its tail onto the water kind of like a young child does with its hand only much louder and more dramatic. What an awesome behavioral display- dramatic still from 2 miles away. As we neared the whale, the entire team emerged on deck, but I maintained the post as I really enjoy being up on the pilot house- my "office" as I call it. The whale continued to lobe tail (picture attached). We never did biopsy that one.

I spent the rest of the day up there on the pilot house, radioing in information and working with the team to find whales, collect arrows and retrieve buoys. The view of the whales was excellent. We sampled one huge male whale with a dramatically ridged back. He actually turned and went under the boat with his tail visible on one side and his head on the other. Another set came from two whales that went everywhere together. We followed them for a couple of hours before sampling each of them. All told we had 6 biopsies on the day. Total now 20 sperm whales and 1 Bryde's.

I kept us going late. The team wanted our traditional 7 pm stop, but I felt we had plenty of light and wanted to reach a goal of 6. It was closing in on 7:30 and I checked in with Captain Bob. He indicated there was a lot of chatter on the array suggesting most, if not all of the whales were feeding.

I said "Okay then let's stop and get our water sample. Wait a minute, did I just see a whale blow????!! Yes, I did! Whale at 2 O'clock! 100 yards!" We followed in and had our 6th sample of the day. With that we stopped for the day and collected our water sample.

I lingered a while on the pilothouse platform feeling blessed for such a day in the "office". I enjoyed the solitude of the sunset (picture attached) and was pleased with a successful day.

Tomorrow is another day and I suspect you will find me in the "office" again.

John

P.S. We are still off Louisiana finding sperm whales. Our current location is 28 degrees 13.3 minutes North and 89 degrees 04.8 minutes West, for those who want to track us as we go. For Google maps (not Google Earth - but maps) use (include letters and comma): 28.133 N, 89.048 W



