

Day 35, Voyage 2, July 12, 2011

The morning went by quietly. Shortly after lunch, Johnny radioed down that some sort of unidentified cetacean (meaning some sort of whale, dolphin or porpoise) was about 1/2 mile away in front of the boat. It proved to be a group of pilot whales. There are two types of pilot whales- short finned and long finned. These had such long falcate (hooked) fins that Captain Bob and I were sure they were long finned. But, the guide book says one cannot determine the difference at sea-so they go down in the record just as pilot whales.

There were 7 whales in the group. These whales are much bigger than a dolphin, but much smaller than a sperm whale in the range of 15-20 feet long or so. They are black with very round heads. They, like sperm whales, feed on squid. They will make an interesting comparison to the sperm whales as their diets are roughly similar, but they are much smaller in size.

Well, we are permitted to biopsy fin whales so we did. They are not the least bit phased by us or the boat swimming slowly around the area. They'd be up for a while and then just under the water and then up for a while and so on. Not much of their bodies showed above the water. Picture attached. The biopsying looked straightforward, but different. Within short order, we had two biopsies.

There was one remarkable moment in the middle of the biopsying. We had sampled the first two whales and they were in the underwater phase of their swimming pattern. Suddenly, Ian raced thru the pilot house asking Bob to hold off for a moment before shifting the engine into gear. He dashed to the fore deck. Bob and I craned our necks out of the pilot house to see what was the matter. It turned out there was a large school of mahi (aka el dorado) on the port side (blue fish in picture attached). He tossed in a line and within minutes had caught a large fish. A second was apparently also hooked, but got away. The fish was processed for samples.

We resumed our biopsying efforts and sampled a third whale. We actually biopsied a 4th, but could not find the arrow from it. We decided to stop with the biopsying at 4 whales as we did not want to sample a whale twice. Having sampled four, the biopsiers did not feel they could tell them apart well enough to sample the other three. After a couple of hours of searching for the lost arrow, we gave up searching for it and the team enjoyed a swim call to relieve them of the days heat.

Our biopsy total on this leg is 37 sperm whales and 3 pilot whales, and our overall total is 41 sperm whales, 3 pilot whales and 1 Bryde's whale. Plus, we are still trying for fish cells and our first attempts at jellyfish cell lines.

Tonight sunset was different, lots of clouds, but still interesting, photo attached.

John

P.S. We are off Louisiana looking for sperm whales while heading in. Our current location is 28 degrees 30.0 minutes North and 89 degrees 00.1 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): 28.300 N, 89.001 W

For those of you who are new to this email diary - the previous days can be found at:
<https://cms.usm.maine.edu/toxicology/dr-wises-voyage-leg-summaries-2011>





