

## Day 36, Voyage 2, July 13, 2011

I was up early and writing today when the first whales were sighted. The first was reported a mile away, but when I looked it was not that close i.e. not quite close enough to call whales. I told the helm (John Bradford) to tell me when we cut the distance in half. I went to dress as it looked like we'd soon be close enough to start the process.

When I returned I asked the helm if we had cut the distance in half. He said the whale fluked and no others were in sight though many were clicking on the array. A few minutes later another was spotted. This one was close enough to call whales and actually turned out to be a pair. Slowly the team emerged and took their places. We approached the whales.

They were large whales. The approach was good. The biopsiers lined up for a sample. Suddenly, Johnny called out that there was something wrong with the whale. Something weird seemed attached to it and the dorsal fin was floppy. They withdrew their crossbows until we could assess the whale from the photos. The photo showed a long blue antenna attached to the whale (photo attached). Someone had tagged this whale with a satellite transmitter to see where it would go.

We headed for the two whales with a plan to focus on the other whale. We approached the whale. I became a bit worried as we had this odd sky with bright blue sky on one side and a big storm headed to us on the other. I wondered if the storm would hold off and allow us to sample. I took a picture of each side- they are attached. The remarkable one was of Johnny, storm approaching, whale blowing at his feet (iphone camera is pretty good- the person in the foreground in Nick). Two minutes later, Johnny had released his arrow and we had a sample from that whale. Shortly thereafter we were in a deluge with thunder and lightning that would last well into the afternoon.

The team read, and wrote and played games waited for the storm to abate. The boat rocked to and fro, and every time we tried to restart watches the thunder would clap and the lightning would pulse and we'd have to bring everybody back in. Finally, about 2 pm Johnny and Nate were able to resume watch. Within 15 minutes, they radioed in that a whale was 200 yards away. The game was afoot and the team resumed work.

This effort was different. The sky was gray and menacing. The water was wavy and very choppy. In the pilot house, John Bradford was manning the helm under Bob's guidance as he attempted his first time approaching a whale for a sample. The only problem was- we had no visual of the whale due to the conditions and it was within 100 yards of the boat. The tension built as the team in bow wondered what the heck we were doing in the pilot house. But, then the whale was spotted and John turned the boat for a nice alignment with the whale on the starboard side. He was pulling alongside just

as the whale dove and fluked! So close, because as you know when whales fluke- it's a deep dive.

But, wait. I told you a few emails back that these Gulf whales don't like to follow the rules. Sure enough, I glanced out the window and saw frantic gesturing by Shouping and Johnny on the starboard side. We could not see or hear anything at that second, but I called over to Bob and John that the whale must be back up. Sure enough, there it was- a full fluke for a 90 second dive. John lined the boat up- the whale seemingly deciding to help by swimming near the boat- Johnny released his arrow and we had our second sample of the day. The team quickly recovered the arrow and the buoy and went inside out of weather.

Congratulations John Bradford on your first successful steering the boat to a whale biopsy!

Late in the day the sun shone brightly, but no more whales. Picture of sunset attached.

I have learned a correction is needed. Yesterday, I wrote: "Well, we are permitted to biopsy fin whales so we did." I should have said pilot whales not fin whales- though we are permitted for both species of pilot whales and fin whales. I just have had fin whales on my mind for scientific reasons. When I write I am often interrupted and sometimes lose my place. Alas, I don't have time to proofread. Sorry about the confusion.

John

P.S. We are off Louisiana looking for sperm whales while heading in. Our current location is 29 degrees 04.7 minutes North and 88 degrees 06.2 minutes West, for those who want to track us as we go. For Google maps (not Google Earth - but maps) or Bing 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>



