

Days 69-70, Voyage 2, August 16-17, 2011

Another quiet day, it looks like the only Bryde's whale we are going to see on this leg was our middle of the night visitor. Disappointing, but it's been a great expedition. The highlight of the day was a large mahi that we caught. Photo of Cathy processing it for samples attached.

Beyond that, it was business as usual lots of watching, but alas no whales. This leg has been enjoyable despite only seeing whales on day 1. Mike has schemed and dreamed with me quite a bit and there are new ideas to develop and try. Laura has been a delight with her pleasant demeanor and her general sense of excitement. I hope they enjoyed us as much as we enjoyed them.

The white stuff mystery may be solved- possible duckweed that was washed into the Gulf by the flooding of the Mississippi and bleached by the ocean. We will test for that back at the lab in Maine.

It's hard to believe that 70 days have passed since we started this expedition. We sailed 3,741 miles this summer. We biopsied 83 whales from 3 different species (79 sperm whales). We collected over 100 liters of water from 23 different locations. I don't have the tallies yet, but we collected a lot of fish, invertebrates, Sargasso weed and so on. My head spins at the amount and diversity of samples we collected and all the work still to come. We had air samples from each leg. Truly a bountiful expedition and a lot of work collecting and logging all of them.

I hope all of you have enjoyed this email diary, all 48 of them. We have appreciated all of the support and notes you sent. The many kind words with my mother's passing were very helpful. Some of the other email comments will stick with us for a while as we were taken with things like the pelican delivery system for sweet tea. Thanks for sharing this expedition with us. There is more to come as we have humpback expeditions set up for the fall; you will want to hear about them. I will also try to correspond more during the year as things develop.

We have also appreciated the support of the administration, faculty, staff and students at USM, who have supported us and been flexible in working with us at sea. Thanks to all of you.

I can't say enough about the great team in my land laboratory. From Chris keeping our IT humming and connected, to Amie and Carolyne handling the samples we sent, to Jane ordering and organizing details, to James handling the website, to Hong

overseeing the shop. Great job gang. Thanks also to all of the Wise Lab team who are handling the whale cell cultures. The lab, too, has been flexible and productive with me as we have written grants, papers, abstracts and reports over these 70 days. I have enjoyed and appreciated that flexibility and that productivity.

We had a lot of great people on the boat who came on for a stint to help (22 of them) and worked long and hard and helped us get all those samples. We enjoyed their company, camaraderie and help. Many thanks to Chris, Rick, Shanelle, Cynthia, Nora, Alyssa, Jane, Nick, Nate Polhemus, Shouping, John Atkinson, Mark, Ariel, Rikki, Brady, Bob, Jonah, James, Franklin, Andy, Mike and Laura. Thanks for being so helpful and fitting in so well. Could not have had all this success without you!

70 days on an expedition is a long time. The boat is small. The showers are irregular and sleep is always insufficient. It takes a special group of people to work this hard, this long and get along. My biggest thanks goes to them the core of this expedition: Captain Bob, First mate Ian, John Branford, Sandy, Johnny and Cathy. What can I say? Thank you seems so insufficient. Tremendous job team. Abundant memories for all of us. I have enjoyed these 70 days with you and appreciated all that you have done to make it all work. It wasn't easy, but it was important and we did it, together. Thanks.

I thought I would remind everyone of who the core crew is so I have attached pictures of each of them. They gave it their all and worked tirelessly for more than 70 days. Remarkable team.

Last, but not least in anyway, (yeah, I know you thought I forgot you when you didn't see your name in the list of 22), thanks to Iain Kerr, none of this happens without you and all of your hard work behind the scenes. We see it and we value it and we all thank you. You're the best!

Fittingly, at least to me, the final sunset of this year's voyage was orange (picture attached).

We are safe and in port now. Home is just a mere 1,478-mile drive away. I can hardly wait.

I am often asked what my favorite moment of the expedition is. There are indeed many special moments with the whales, with the skies, with the team that I will cherish, always. But, the one moment that is my top favorite is when the voyage is done, the samples are all safely stored in our land lab, all of the team members who spent time on the boat are home safe and sound and I am in my bed at home, head on the pillow and finally able to sleep a deep sleep, knowing all is safe and sound and the job well done. That is my favorite moment. I look forward to that moment coming soon.

My what a great trip it has been.

More soon.

John

















