

## Wednesday, April 26 – Day 16 by Dr. Wise

Dear All,

A day with the wind mostly down, finally blessed us again. Ultimately, there was a brief spot of wind, but it was not long lived. Right away, we had our first biopsy of the day. Oh, it took a bit of tracking, and Carlos eventually got the sample from the dinghy, but we had one, and we were happy. Relief always follows the first biopsy, as we do not want to go a day with no biopsies. After all, it costs a lot to launch an expedition, both in money and personal sacrifice. Naturally, you want the most success possible.

After the humpback, we did not see another whale for some time. Mark organized the watches well, and made sure the team was giving their best. Every hour the watch changed and one person climbed up to the crow's nest, while the other one climbed down. Another watch was on top of the pilot house, and that too changed once an hour. Searching fore and aft, hour after hour, but still no whales.

Eventually, we entered what is considered one of the prime sperm whale areas in the Sea of Cortez. X never marks the spot for where sperm whales are (but maybe someone could add that to a tracking software package) as they go under for a long, long time, and you have no idea where they will pop up. Actually, it is easier to track sperm whales acoustically.

Coincidentally, Andrea brought a hydrophone (underwater microphone) with her, which we converted to a directional hydrophone with a net and a plastic bowl. The bowl blocks noise from behind the microphone, thus, any sound detected must come from the front direction. You use the net to turn the microphone, and find the direction any sound you detect is coming from. Only very faint sounds were heard on the hydrophone, meaning, if they were sperm whale sounds, they were very far away. Using the net and bowl – the sounds were not heard so no direction could be ascertained.

We kept watch and searching, but no sperm whales. Actually, in the two expeditions here so far, last years and this one, we have not found any sperm whales in the prime sperm whale areas... Nope, we find them, where they are not supposed to be in other areas, like Cabo San Lucas. That area is still to come so maybe we will get lucky there.

The afternoon was quiet and still no whales. On helm, Captain Fanch worried about tomorrow's weather. Doubtful, of how far we would get today, he was concerned we would be exposed on the water when some really rough winds were to arrive tomorrow.

Oh, but then late in the day, we spotted a large pod of pilot whales! Black whales with prominent, but 'short' dorsal fins (compared to their long-finned cousins in the Atlantic), the pod approached the boat. Up and down the whales porpoised through the water towards the boat. They were everywhere. At our 3 o'clock, there were also dolphins in the water.

Rick and Mark loaded up their bows. Eager to get the samples we needed, they also understood, we had little time left. Soon and arrow flew and then another. Hits! Yet, the whales were

undisturbed and remained near and around the boat. The misses caused a strong startle reaction, while the hits caused much less of an impression.

Over and around a through, we moved through the water following first one part of the pod and then the other. After a little whale, oops I mean to write while, the whales moved off on their own, and we resumed our southerly route. Didn't take long for the samples to be stored, and the team to break out in smiles, and happy chatter about these remarkable small whales. Mark even broke out in a dance with me. It was a breath of fresh air to be working on whales again after so much windy and whale-free areas. Tomorrow, there is another wind concern so we will see.

60 whales in total with 6 sampled today. All is well with us in the Sea of Cortez. We will not anchor tonight as we head South.

You can see all the emails from Day 0 through today's (Day 16) on

[www.WiseLaboratory.org](http://www.WiseLaboratory.org)

Good night from here until tomorrow.

John









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RESEARCH TEAM



























