

Thursday, April 13 – Day 4 by Dr. Wise

Dear All,

Patience. Lots and lots of patience. Extensive amounts of patience. And then - more patience. So much patience is required...if you are going to be a whale toxicologist. Endless hours of searching, watching, guessing, following, hoping to find a whale and earn a sample. Being with whales is an inspiring and humbling experience. Earning a sample from them... well...let's say it this way... it builds character. But, in the end, the magnificence of the whales and the interconnectedness of their health with our health and the health of the ocean makes all the character building worth it.

Me and patience? Yeah, well let's put it this way- my students have described me as the world's most patient, impatient person. Perhaps, my family would not put it so kindly, so let's put it this way- after 7 years of working with whales at sea and several hundred biopsies- I have an abundance of character!

I realized early today was going to be a character building day for all of us. X would not mark the spot on this day; long hours of searching would be required. I came up on deck with our first whale sighting of the morning. Exactly what species, was uncertain at the time – a small fin whale was the best guess. Gradually, we grew closer and closer to the blows, but still no clear guess on what it was. I noticed that each time Andrea spotted the whale it was in a very different place with an erratic track. Right away my mind raced to the one whale that darts around erratically and requires probably the most patience – the Bryde's whale. Little frustrates a whale biopsier quite the way a Bryde's whale does.

To me the Bryde's whale is like a little kid who tries desperately to get you to play chase by running up and says “nananananana you caannt catch me”. You have to chase the child a bit first, but eventually the kid will let you catch him. So it is with the Bryde's whale, it seems to me. You follow along as the whale darts left and right to and fro and then in one moment it will suddenly appear right near the boat and allow a sample. It's almost as if, like that kid, the whale can sense your frustration and, just as you're ready to quit – allows you to catch him (or in the whale's case –biopsy it).

So it was today. With the sun baking us for a third day – the whale was ahead of us. Then it was behind us. Then it was left of us. Then it was right of us. Wow, Bryde's whale are quick. So we went straight. We turned around and went back. We went left. We went right. Every direction the whale wanted us to turn. We turned. Still no closer.

After a while, I received a recommendation that we consider moving on from this whale as we were getting nowhere. Indeed, it felt that way. But, I remembered the simple rule – patience- so we waited some more. The whale surfaced of the port (left) side of the boat well out of range and then dove. The team's frustration was palpable. There might have been a collective groan or if not – it felt like one. And then as if it knew the game was over, the whale surfaced and Carlos shouted from the crow's nest. “Its right there! Right

next to the boat". Indeed, the whale surfaced right next to the two biopsiers and a sample was earned. We and the whale parted ways. It to enjoy the water and a meal. Us to build character in the brutal Cortez sun.

We eventually found another whale much later in the day – a fin whale this time and we earned another sample. The team has really meshed and is working well together. Our total is now 7 biopsies from 5 whales and 3 different species. If you want to follow us on Google Earth or something like that, we are at 26 degrees 21.31 latitude and 111 degrees 24.65 longitude.

I have attached pictures of the Bryde's whale (or as much of it as we could catch on camera), more images of the coastline and of course our beautiful sunset. The sun is a challenge, but morale is high and the team is working well.

All is well with us in the Sea of Cortez. We are at anchor as the sea rocks us gently to sleep under our blanket of planets and stars with the moon keeping its watch on us.

Good night from here until tomorrow.

John







