

## Thursday, April 13 – Day 2 by Johnny Wise

Heat sickness is a miserable contender.

Yesterday, with all the humpbacks around, I lost track of my water intake and very quickly regretted it. So today- I started with a tall glass of water to get ahead of the dehydration. The sun beats down on us relentlessly, and we have come up with many ways to overcome the onslaught of dry heat in this desert coast. We each ALWAYS have a liter of water with us that gets refilled almost every hour. Before going up to the crow's nest we collect a bucket of sea water to dump over our heads. Though some of us would like to seize this opportunity to get a nice bronze tan – we prefer to preserve our health and keep covered up with loose, light clothing, usually leaving just our arms and legs uncovered. Hats, sunglasses and wicking face cloths are a must for proper protection. I've even started a habit of keeping my shoulder-length hair in a pony tail, so that I can keep ice cubes in it (fortunately we do have 2 freezers and 3 fridges on board). Today went much better than yesterday regarding heat sickness – but more than once I still had to take myself out of the whale searching game to bring my temperature down, sitting in the shade or below decks with ice cubes and wet washcloths across my head and shoulders.

Our day began with another Bryde's whale travelling south. We followed it for an hour or two, getting closer each time it surfaced. Rick and I waited in the bowsprit for our chance to biopsy, roasting in the hot sun. Just when we thought we might get close enough, it dove and we settled in to wait another 10 minutes for it to resurface. As we scanned the water for sign of its resurfacing, Carlos began shouting from the crow's nest, "There! There! There!" As a biopsier sitting in the bowsprit, this is most un-useful thing someone can say to us regarding where the whale is...usually we insist everyone give us a direction, using the bow of the boat as 12 o'clock and the stern as 6 o'clock, followed by a relative distance. This was unlike Carlos to give such vague instructions, and given the excitement in his voice...we knew it was close! Almost immediately as he was saying this, I saw the top of the whale's head begin to surface...right below my feet! No wonder he was so excited. In a fluid motion that took 3 seconds, I unlocked the safety of my crossbow, raised it without really aiming and released my arrow into its back near the dorsal. Then received the warm, fishy smelling mist of its breath. My first Bryde's whale sample! The boat stopped, a buoy was tossed to mark the arrows, and the whale went on its way as though nothing had happened.

We have had a handful of encounters with Bryde's whales here in the Sea of Cortez and also in the Gulf of Mexico. Of all the whales we encounter, this species has some of the most mysterious behavior...they have the speed and mobility to out-maneuver us, yet they always seem to make a close pass by our boat seeming to check us out. Last year we had one that seemed to want to play a game with us, or was testing the limits of our speed and maneuverability before coming to check us out. Mark insisted it was the bright orange hat I was wearing – one that he gave to me as a gift from his island home. Whatever it is, it's clear that they are curious about us.

The rest of the day passed rather quietly – the sun beat down on us with little to no breeze as relief, the crew kept themselves busy with reading, writing, chatting and joking with each other about who could do the most exercises with this handled-wheel that gives a good ab workout. The water looked like molten glass, mirroring the sky and mountains like a watercolor painting.

Then, late in the afternoon, Rachel spotted her first whale of the trip. A sighting such as hers is one of the most rewarding, as EVERYONE wants another whale to break the monotony and distract us from the heat. Also- when the water is as flat as it was, sighting whales becomes that much more challenging, because they barely break the surface and don't make a big tower of water when they breathe. The only tricky thing with this sighting was the whale was in a national refuge (next to Isla Carmen), and we weren't allowed to biopsy until it was out of the refuge....which was about 5 miles away from where we sighted it. Fortunately, this fin whale was swimming in the right direction (albeit lazily). So we waited and we followed until we were just outside the refuge – a bit of a comical circumstance, as we biopsied it maybe ¼ mile outside of the refuge...and Carlos very much assured us we were outside of it, he lives and works in this area so he knows these waters like the back of his hand (maybe even better).

After the fin whale was biopsied, Carlos asked us to stop so he and Andrea could drop a hydrophone in the hopes of catching any bit of the fin whale's voice – an important part of their research – and then documented various things about the location...depth, topography of the sea floor (we were right over a dropoff from 200 m deep to 400 m deep), weather conditions, etc. We were just barely in an area known for having a spot of satellite reception, so as Carlos and Andrea took down their data, the rest of us scrambled for reception to touch base with work, friends, and loved ones back home. We barely had a signal and it was very brief, but it was important to all (and rather comical for me to watch).

We are now anchored near Mercenarios Point, along with half a dozen other boats, and a small pueblo on the shoreline. N 26°21.051', W 111° 24.884'

The moon is up, the water is still calm and flat, allowing some of the brighter stars and planets to reflect off its surface and looks oily black, while the desert mountains loom around us pitch black against a blue-black sky.

I've also attached a photo of the humpback whale breaching from the previous day. I was sitting in the bowsprit looking for it to resurface when this photo was taken (thanks Rick!). Absolutely mindblowing!

Cheers,

Johnny





























