

Tuesday, April 12. Day 11 at Sea - by Dr. Wise

Our last full day at sea. Tonight we will anchor and tomorrow by 4 pm we have to be in port so the Captain can join the ship and bring us to dock.

The day started out quite windy with swells that rocked the boat. We had been motoring all night to catchup on time and distance to our final port of call. There was not much sample collecting that can be done in these winds and seas. The winds blow the arrows off target and the waves interfere with the arrows speed and target. Both make the arrows difficult to impossible to recover. It is not safe for the whales to biopsy in these conditions and it is not safe for us. So we waited for the winds to die down.

Round about lunch time, Mark spotted whale right near the starboard side of the boat. The team assembled. Suddenly, the whale darted over to the port side. Then it suddenly darted starboard.

“What kind of whale is it’, someone shouted out.

A variety of answers followed. “Fin”, “humpback” and so on.

I said “No, only one whale acts like that around sailboats. It’s a Bryde’s whale. Oh, this one was going to be an adventure.

You might recall the Bryde’s whales (pronounced Broodah’s whale as it’s a South African-based name) from the Gulf of Mexico trips. Bryde’s whales have a worldwide distribution, but in the Gulf of Mexico, their population is only somewhere between 15 and 50 individuals total. We spent a lot of time looking for them in the Gulf of Mexico as their small population was right in the path of the oil. They are hard to find and tricky to biopsy.

The whale darted port, starboard in front around and around and around. Crazy whale.

Mike, our current Captain asked me “Why is this whale acting so squirrely”?

I explained. It’s a Bryde’s whale. They are both curious and shy. Thus, it wants to check us out but not have us notice. If you simply avoid following it round and round and

instead kinda go straight in the direction it's tending to go, it will eventually pull alongside and we can sample it.

Sure enough after zipping around us many, many times, the whale finally popped up within good biopsy range and we had our first biopsy of the day and a sample from our sixth species on this trip!

Soon after the wind and the swells passed and we could not continue to sample whales. The rest of the day was spent keeping ourselves occupied in the boat.

Tomorrow we will have the morning to sample if we see any whales and then this wonderful adventure will end. Our total is now 24 whales biopsied, from 6 different species – I am pleased.

I have attached a series of pictures of the Bryde's whale and its biopsy that Carlos took with his camera, plus a picture of our lovely sunset.

John









