

## Tuesday, April 5 - A Whale Party - Mark Martin

The last two days had been different, we had a disappointing day with no whales. Me and Johnny got to explore. We deployed a paddleboard and a Kayak to use the directional Hydrophone and hear for whales. We heard dolphins talking in the beautiful sea of Cortez. In the Ja 'tay Eñoom (original name for the sea which was given to Cortez in modern lore). We did not see much and I felt the searchers anxiousness when they told me we were calling it a day. The thought of land was enticing because we were on another planet, but I was in whale mode. I wanted our trip to be worth I to have enough biopsies to be good science. Worth it to our funders, universities and all the other people who counted on us. The idle time did give me a chance to hear about Sea Sheperd's missions and what they were doing here. In the trip down we talked about the doomed Vaquita dolphin. How the math was a negative one, they were done, another endemic endangered species to go the way of extinction by way of fishing. In this case illegal fishing of nets that killed the "little Cow" dolphin. But Sea Sheperd is into miracles, so they would give it their all and even if anything else failed, they would at least achieve the social global awareness of the need for marine mammal conservation. They had achieved so much with the campaigns against whalers, their methods, efficient. I respected their efforts and understood that they were their own breed. Hopefully that breed would grow. We landed and explored the desert coastline. Jumping into very cold water did not affect my Puerto Rican skin too much. I had learned in New England that the excitement of swimming in different waters created thicker skin. I saw angel sharks and rays and hoped to see Stormy the sea lion. On land graveyard of bones from many birds and dolphins covered the sandy beach, we even found sea lion's skulls and whale vertebrae We had quite a collection to show. At night we investigated what was reported as a possible Vaquita carcass. Captain Oona and the Wise team went to shore and found several dead dolphins and what appeared to be a small whale with some skin left that we agreed was probably a Pilot Whale. Returning to the Martin Sheen at night we saw bioluminescence everywhere, a species of shrimp which shot out a liquid blue, a glow worm that spun around in a love dance in light, and my old friends the dinoflagellates. With no light pollution at all and as we dragged our stranded engineer in his paddle board behind our dinghy, we turned into glowing magic.

The next day we found a variety of whale's Pygmy sperm whales, a sei whale and a Minke, humpback and fin whales. The Pygmies really did not give us a chance.

Then a decisive moment happened as I spotted a humpback way in the distance. We started clicking as a team. Our coordination with Captain Oona, Mike and Carlos was starting to show results. Our approaches better and our communications clearer. I had gotten used to the crew's navigation and had learned to communicate with the captain. She was the boss, Dr. Wise in charge of us, Johnny the lead who knew the most about the chase. Me with the best view. We clicked and although Johnny hit the humpback clearly, no sample. Beautiful whale though. We sampled fin whales easily and even got a sample from the elusive Minke whale. The day ended with a sei whale, a species I had never seen before, with our newfound coordination we almost caught it but in the fading light it seemed to be going a knot faster than us. Before we gave up I saw it, far, huge, the biggest I had seen. Reported knowing two things, it was too far and it could have been a blue. Too far

We gave up and that night we ran all night surrounded by bioluminescence lit schools of fish that approached the boat. I awaited my Life of Pi moment to see the whale glowing as it breached. If it did, it did not do it for us. But what a sight it must be to see a whale engulfed in blue living lights.

Mark