

Saturday, April 9 – Flying Whales - Mark Martin

We were back on the chase for giants

I was counting the days with dread, how many 3 more days 4? I learned to savor the best moments in life and only missed them later. No time to waste on anything but our mission and the absorption of this special time with the most incredible creatures on earth on this glorious voyage. We were missing some, humpbacks, sperm whales and I wanted Orcas. Everyone knew I wanted to go in with the biggest dolphin in the world, but I had managed to convince them I wouldn't jump. The sea gave us an occasional sailfish and the undeniable fin of sharks, none seem to care much about us, we were just another pod of mammals that swam badly and needed a float. Johnny and I rose early and I usually closed the night with Sean. I was loving the vegan food and wondered if the reality that to be an environmentalist you needed to be more vegan, or at least vegetarian. At the very least know the food didn't cost a species, an area, an unsustainable blow to our balance. Shannon was a great chef so it helped a lot. We all played different card games to pass the time, we even invented one named Blue whale in honor of Ric's friend. We discussed the places we came from, where we were going after. The trip course was predetermined; whales were the plan but Cabo San Lucas our destination. We had waypoints that included stops for anchorage, gas, supplies and of course whales. Carlos was the biologist who knew the area best so he constantly was asked where are the highest probability areas? what species are here? When was the last time you saw this or that? Seasons, reasons. He was good, he also had the job of cataloging flukes and markings.

"Big whale" "Blow" we were blue, it wasn't, *Megaptera novaeangliae*. We saw one two, three of them.

And our slow approach began, I was up and since me and the rest of the world love this whales, I was happy to be a part of its research. We couldn't approach one area so we focus on two of them.

Some of the whales were captured on film with the drone. You can access the videos and pictures at the Sea Shepherd website.

I got a chance, I had become more comfortable with the biopsies and knew the deal with this active whale. They showed a lot of their body as they went down, moved around a

lot, reacted to the arrows and sang and dance a lot. Jokingly I had been dubbed a humpback by the wise team a few days ago. Worst things to be compared to. I focused on the whale, we timed it, the approach now flawless, I was happy to know that I had helped the coordination between Captain and Marine Scientist as they called us. When it was really hectic we switched to Spanish and it somewhat helped, the Spanish speakers. That was the Captain (French but raced on a sailboat in Columbia, Mar from Cataluña who taught sailing, JP from Chile and I. Johnny and Sean could manage. Mike kind of had to. We did make a solid colorful team. We assigned whales. "safeties off" two hits, both whales sampled, photographs, arrows in the boat. I wished we had years to do this.

The humpbacks did not really react to much to our biopsies like sometimes they do. In fact, they seemed to hang out, a lot. Since we could not sample the same whales it became hours of seeing these whales follow or lead the same course. And then they jumped, once twice three times first one whale then the other. The underpaid TV commercial actors that they were, they were putting on a show for themselves. We all got to watch, Johnny and I got a Bird's eye view form the top of the mast. We were waiting for a double breach, Johnny assured me he would flip. They didn't but they kept having fun. "whale, 12 O'clock". From the deck came the same questions we had been hearing for two hours "Are they the same whales?" NOOO not this time, but another humpback. We were close. Timed the dives. It came up, close, dove. We were right around it, all hands on deck. I was up high, Looking, looking it had to be close.

I looked ahead, looked to port, starboard, looked back and as my eyes came forward I saw something strange and big, was that a Manta Ray? Very wide but Mantas get 6 meters across, white with black. "Wait, What the? "

"WHALE" JOHNNY IT IS right UNDERNEATH US!!!!

Over the radio I said calmly "Neutral, please Captain" and neutral we went, everyone saw it. Majestic and right below us moving forward. I had mistaken its wide white pectorals, but as it came up and forward it painted a marvelous whale silhouette a meter or 2 from the boat. Everybody said something about how cool it looked cameras went crazy. We concentrated. "Maintain course, forward, slow!" Noises underneath the water scare the whales, so our approaches were better if there was no loud shifting or engine burst. The depth finders and other equipment had to be turned off while we were on a whale.

The rest was academic, we timed, she came up, Captain maneuvered, either Ric or Johnny released, sample. Dr. Wise expressed his delight. We were glad to give him the results he worked so hard to put together It was hump day. The whale hung out too, we apologize whale, we have to go anchor, be well.

In their trip before our arrival Sea shepherd had released a humpback from a net, another one was reported dead by net.

They need us. All of us. They sing well but can't seem to get the message to everyone up here. They did to us.

Mark