

Day 100: October 24, 2010

It's been 100 days. It shows.

The day greeted us with a brilliant sunrise (photo attached). We had high hopes for the day. Or at least I did. Rick told me he wasn't feeling any whales today. He turned out to be right. Guess he is officially our whale whisperer now. He'd better feel them tomorrow...

The weather was difficult, with winds and swells, but workable all day. We ran watches all day, but aside from pods of dolphins- no whales. It was hard, hard work. This day was one to test your mettle. I did a number of watches on the pilot house and from elsewhere. Lots of rocking and rolling. Lots of gray sky. Few bearings. The ocean likes to play tricks on you. Was that a whale blow I just saw??? Nope, just a far off whitecap being blown by the wind. Hey, maybe that was a whale's back!!! Nope, just a tease of dark color on the side of a small wave. So on and so on searching and looking. It really tries your patience because its hours and hours of looking for something that may simply not be there. It's hard to stare out on a featureless ocean for hours even harder when what you're looking for isn't there.

But days like these have their place and their purpose, It is these failed search days that make us into seasoned whale researchers. It is our commitment and perseverance during these gray wavy times that earns us the right to call ourselves field researchers. If it were easy. It would be done. If anyone could do it. Everyone would. If it was quick. It would already be over. But it is not easy. It's not quick and only a few can stand the test of days like today and get the job done. It is days like today that make the good days precious and special and rare. It is because we had days like this one that we celebrate and relish the days like number 98 and the special gift that whale gave to us.

I have learned to value and appreciate even this day.

Today, I marveled at the commitment of my team. The work would be hard, really, really hard and the day would be long. There was Rick quietly scanning, trying to find a whale even though they had already told him they were not around. There was Johnny trying to make the day fun with laughter and jokes and shouts of joy and the challenge of climbing once again onto that midlevel platform to ride the bucking waves and stare out at the sea...again. There was Shouping steeling himself against the biting wind he hates so much yet still fulfilling that platform duty and trying ever so hard to find a whale. Young Matthew, desperately wanting to just quit and sleep, yet forcing himself back onto watch each and every time. Sandy doing everything she can to keep the science moving forward checking the Sargasso weed and counting each and every krill we caught. Then there were our captain and crew battling colds and keeping us steady on our course. My job...try to keep the team focused and inspired and allowing them to vent at me through a variety of verbal barrages of frustration. Ahab appears to be the most common adjective for me today...

But we made it through the day and gave it our best. No whales seen, but still a job well done. It may sound odd, but more than 24 man-hours of whale watches completed, the boat safe and on course, and krill samples in the freezer- sounds like a job well done to me.

Yes it's been 100 days and it shows. Not because the team is frustrated with challenging weather, but because they did their jobs in difficult conditions and did them well. The krill samples were collected. Processed and stored with nary a word from me about it. All of the available science was done and done well almost automatically. There a good group. They work hard. They deserve some whales. Today, they earned that reward. Let's hope it comes soon! Rick- start whispering!

I have attached a sunset picture as is my usual now. You'll see tonight's was quite different. Still beautiful, but different. I have also attached some dolphin clicks and whistles I recorded from the array in the morning. It's an interesting mix of sounds.

I wish you well from the Gulf and hope tomorrow brings us whales.

John



