

Day 10, Voyage 2, June 17, 2011

Well, we know we are on a voyage now. One of the great misconceptions about going to sea is that it is a boondoggle- always fun and relaxing. In reality it is anything but. There are indeed amazing and incredible moments, but they frame long hard days of sometimes very frustrating work. Today, began the heavy grind and frustration.

It started early. Really early. Johnny was calling out "whale" before the sun was really even up about 6:30 am. Bleary-eyed, I jumped out of bed and changed into work clothes; my eyes too bleary to even read the time. I came out on deck and made sure the team was assembled and...the whale dove... That meant at least 45 minutes until we saw the whale again. Then I heard the clicks and realized from the pattern that this whale was the same whale we had been foiled by yesterday. The one that stayed down for 70 minutes and laughed at us as the day ended. Sure enough, we spent a few hours trying to catch up, but he always surfaced a mile away and dove as we got in sight of his tail fluke. Finally, he simply disappeared no sightings and no clicks and of course no sample.

That effort led to a lot of sun and heat and exhausting concentration for the team. There was little breeze and the Gulf heat was in full swing. One of the great contrasts on this voyage, like last year's, is that we have college-age Mainers working in the Gulf. It creates a bit of a behavioral conundrum as you see in Maine we don't get a lot of warm sunny days. Consequently, each one is cherished and maximized by spending as much time outside in the sun as possible. So when the students wake to a sunny day like every day has been so far, they immediately migrate outside to maximize their time in the sun

However, we are not in Maine anymore and in the Gulf there are a lot of warm sunny days and they are a lot warmer and sunnier than anything we ever have in Maine. In fact, hot and muggy is a much better descriptor. That heat and sun can really pack a wallop and wear you out. So we try to monitor the sun exposure and now are requiring the students, and ourselves, to be inside at certain times. Nevertheless, the day was littered with napping students baked by the Gulf sun.

Not much happened during the day, beyond hot frustrating whale watches that found no whales. As evening approached whales were sighted and hopes raised. We spent about 3 hours with three whales. Sometimes getting close enough, but not the right angle. Sometimes watching them dive deep from afar. By the end of the day, we had seen four sperm whales, but had not even had a chance to attempt a sample. No arrows released so far.

These outcomes are not surprising. Four whales is not very many and it takes patience and persistence to gain samples. We will get there, but on a long hot day, it is indeed frustrating. Last year's voyage was fueled by a sense of determination in response to a national crisis. This year much of the nation feels that crisis as over and done with. Out of sight so out of mind. Consequently, this year's voyage will be fueled by grit and determination and a concern that the crisis will have lasting effects even though one cannot see oil anymore. I think the team is up to the task and I look forward to more fruitful days to come, though they will not likely be soon as we are about to begin a search for Bryde's whales, which is both essential and really, really hard.

The sunset was again fabulous. Picture attached.

John

