

Day 26, Voyage 3, July 2, 2011

It is said that mature male sperm whales feed in oceans at the poles and return to the waters at lower latitudes (like the Gulf of Mexico) to breed. The more I read the more I learn that this saying is true...sometimes. Some male whales remain at lower latitudes for both feeding and breeding. But, the one aspect that is consistent with both types of males is - they live generally solitary lives alone. Female whales travel and socialize in groups, but mature males live alone.

Only visiting occasionally to breed. That is a lifestyle that, for me, is hard to imagine as my wife and kids relish the chance to join in my expeditions.

It is also said that mature sperm whales are large- dramatically larger than the females. The males are 50-60 feet and weigh 80,000-100,000 pounds. The females are roughly half as long and weight 28,000- 36,000 pounds. We saw one such male whale today and, indeed, he was alone and he was big.

The call came at about 8:30 am. We moved next to him and got really close. Too close to sample and instead of being on the bow, he was mid-ship swimming right below Nick and me, six inches from the boat. We watched him arch his back to where we could almost touch it (neither of us tried) and shallow dive away. A really unexpected, breathtaking moment. He was huge and even the 'narrow' part before his tail was massive and muscular. We were more than impressed- wowed really.

I guess this guy decided to have some fun with us. Normally, the whales here execute a few shallow dives and then dive deep. All the diving appears to tire them, so before one of them, we can usually get close and take a sample. This guy, however, seemed to have limitless energy.

We would approach. He would shallow dive. He would appear about a half a mile away. We would approach. He would shallow dive. He would appear about a half a mile away in a totally different direction. Over and over again for two hours. It was he was playing a whale version of hide and seek. Finally, after more than two hours, I guess he got bored or hungry and we got close. Just close enough. So we could almost touch his massive tail fluke as he waved goodbye and dove for lunch. Picture of fluke attached.

Shortly, thereafter, we heard him on the array hunting for food, though frankly it sounded more like he was munching and crunching. Knowing he was the only whale around we ate lunch with the whale until over an hour later he resurfaced. We started his way again, only to see him fluke rather quickly and head down for more food. Truly a remarkable creature to spend so much time and energy shallow diving and swimming for two hours and then deep diving for 70 minutes to then be able to deep dive again in minutes. Just remarkable.

We would not see that whale again. He did remind me of the one in Florida that laughed at us. It could have been him. To travel this far, would be easy for him. Maybe, we will see him again.

We did have a successful day, despite a morning of hide-and-seek with Moby Dick. In the afternoon, we obtained 6 biopsies bringing out total on this leg to 14 and our overall total to 18 sperm whales and 1 Brdye's whale.

Photo of sunset attached.

John

P.S. We are now off Louisiana finding sperm whales. Our current location is 29 degrees 58.1 minutes North and 88 degrees 20.8 minutes West, for those who want to track us as we go. For Google maps (not Google Earth - but maps) use (include letters and comma): 28.581 N, 88.208 W



