

## Day 30: August 15, 2010

A month in already, hard to believe. Seas were active again but still comfortable for most. Not a lot sighted until about 3 pm when Johnny spotted something that looked like whale blows about 2 miles off. One and a half miles in that direction and we encountered the largest pod of dolphins we have seen so far. Way too many to count. There were dolphins racing to the boat from all directions- 90 degrees to starboard,, 90 degrees to port, directly behind us, directly in front of us and all angles in between! Dolphins everywhere. There were bow riding in the front and porpoising on the side- 6 or 8 leaping in the air at a time! They were flipping and flopping, playing chase and just having a whale of a time (no pun intended). We watched the for over an hour until they wore us out and even after we stopped watching they continued on for some time.

Matt wore himself out racing on and off the whale boom, desperate to accidentally on purpose fall in with them. That he managed not to do, though he did manage to get himself satisfactorily wet and he did have to head to bed early from all the added exercise. The funniest moment, which also ended his antics, came when his life jacket suddenly and unexpectedly expanded giving him a big inflated yellow vest around his neck. You see these are safety lifejackets that inflate if they get wet. That way, if you hit your head and fall in the water, the lifejacket still inflates. Well, Matt did not know this aspect and so was scared silly when a wave hit his life jacket and POOF everything inflated. With that event, it was time for him to return from the whale boom. By 4:30 pm we lost Ryan for the night. We are still not sure if he meant to take a short nap and simple slept through or if he felt seasick again and just went to bed for the night. We will find out which in the morning.

Thus, by 7 pm it was Greer and Johnny on the mast looking for whales and Cathy and me atop the pilot house looking for whales and Ryan and Matt fast asleep from their dolphin adventures. It truly was amazing and distracting to see such an overwhelming number of animals. As for the whale blows, Captain Bob felt they were due to the dolphins jumping so high and splashing so much. Johnny maintains they were blows and we just lost focus due to the overwhelming number of dolphins. Which it is we don't know, but to his credit Johnny maintained his vigilance on the mast while those dolphins were with us, but did not see another blow. We did not travel very far today, but we did look hard- except during our dolphin hour.

Tomorrow we will increase the watches further with 4 people on watch almost all day.

It appears the national press is losing its interest in Gulf stories. This development does not surprise me, in part, because the well is capped, but also in part because it has been over 100 days of coverage and that's a long time to keep America's attention. We did not come here for the press. We came here to begin to address our nation's biggest marine pollution disaster in history and try to learn the lessons necessary to diminish its impact and to protect the other waters in the US should another big oil spill happen somewhere else. We now have to learn what are the consequences of this one, so the same mistakes are not repeated.

Our work has only just begun and will continue for many years as there are many levels to dissect. How toxic are dispersants to whales? Do they accumulate in their tissues? How long do they last? Are they damaging DNA? The same questions get asked for crude oil and for metals and then one moves into understanding the mixtures of them. Do mixtures make them more toxic? These are not easy questions and certainly not quick answers. But once we know them, we will know better how to address future problems and the impacts of this one.

I think seeing and knowing how hard we work and how thorough we are we hopefully attract research funds to support us and more undergraduates to USM to learn in these unique research settings.

Having said that, we are receiving lots of local press which is flattering. James has posted many links to those articles on our website.

I also submitted our first scientific abstract today to the national meeting of the Society of Toxicology and Environmental Chemistry (thanks for the help Sandy). We will see if its accepted, but that too will be an important phase- going to local, regional and national meetings to present what we see.

John