

Day 37: August 22, 2010

I woke early to ensure the new group was ready. They just seemed a bit unsure so I figured it was better to be up. It was a short night since I was up late trying to get the array in the water and up and running. The good news was that in the morning the array was working and we could hear both the propeller and the autopilot on it - though no whales. Problem proved to be a bad headset wire. The next challenge was going to be getting a computer to work with it, but that task was for later in the day.

We were greeted by a whole bunch of dolphins. Not sure what kind. Their major focus was on feeding so they were all business and not very playful. Johnny was up on the mast and Juli and I on the pilothouse. Johnny had been up since 5 am doing the hydrophone recordings and to prepare for that, the boat had been turned off and gone silent. It was being finicky about restarting so when Rob arrived for his part of the morning shift- I set about to work on the computer.

The computer kept me and Chris Gianios (on shore in Maine) busy for the better part of the day. We experienced so many delays and detractions that it is just too long a list to go into. But some of the "highlights" of the "conversation" were: Computer cord failed so computer won't work. Ok try the other Dell. Oh no- its hard drive just failed. Shoot- we are in Dell hell. Now what? - No other computer has the necessary serial port so we have no solution. Wait- I found a one more computer on the boat with a serial port in the lab- lets go with that. Okay download whale software. Can't company servers have crashed. Oh phew! servers back up - download successful. Problem - Whale program needs Access database- this computer does not have Access on it. Okay- I'll email to you. Wait- program too big (400 MB) to email- gotta find another way. Hey great news found one- emailed you the link. You're not going to believe this- this computer will not access gmail. Impossible- I have gmail open. Maybe so- but it won't work on this computer. Ok download on the other computer and then transfer it. Download should take 2 hours. Shoot- download timed out and failed. And so on... in the end after a 7 hour download- the computer lost it again and as I go to bed tonight I am starting the 7 hour download a third time!

I kept telling Chris that dark and sinister forces simply were opposing our use of this software! By the end of it - it sure seemed that way. Johnny suggests that it's time to call in the cavalry and have Tina's prayer circle and Mark and Cynthia call in the bright and supportive forces. After this must frustration, I have to agree- so Tina, Mark and Cynthia- a little help here please...

Meanwhile, back on the boat...

About 4 pm when the first download attempt was occurring, I went out on deck. No one on watch on the pilot house. Only Johnny up on the mast. Given the schedule there should have been 2 on the pilothouse and 1 more on the mast. The water was rather calm all day, and we have a clear rule that if one cannot make their shift- they need to tell me so I can adjust. But seasickness overrules all and all four of my team were

wiped out and forgot to apprise me of their status. At this point it was self-evident so I went up on watch on the pilothouse. The rest of the watches were spent with Johnny on the mast and me on the pilothouse. We did not see much but we did see one very impressive loggerhead turtle!

Now, the most physically demanding job on the boat has to be watch from the mid-level platform. You are well up the mast with the boat bouncing around and you are expected to stand for a two hour shift. That platform has exhausted every student who has come on board and the crew who have done it. Both Iain and Captain Bob have indicated that two hours is really all about a person can stand. Few have been able to take 2 hours and even fewer the 4 shifts a day. Yet, it is also the most important watch (aside from the helm) and where we best see the whale blows from. Typically, for those who can do and do the midlevel watch- they are clamoring to come down at the end of their shifts. Hence, when the team got seasick yesterday, only Johnny was left to do the midlevel watch. Determined to find whales and succeed. He stayed on watch without notice or complaint. In fact, he stayed on that watch for FIVE consecutive hours- standing the whole time!!!

This outcome is why the team has to inform me of their status- so I can figure out how to relieve others. Had I known, I would have brought him down or would have gone up myself. As it was, Johnny remained true to the mission. He figured out what the problems were with his teammates and he knew I was embroiled in array chaos. He understood the need and quietly did the job that needed doing. Remarkably, no seasickness- even after such a long shift. He was quite tired though and because of his efforts, I gave him the night off of dish duty. A SKYPE call with a close friend and by bedtime he was ready to go again.

Perhaps, this example will clarify for many why Johnny has become some a reliable and valuable asset for us in the field and why I rely on his perspective and advice. It's not because he is my son. It is because in situations like today- he makes sure the most difficult work gets done as needed, gets done well and always with a hearty laugh and a smile. He came off that mast, confirmed the situation and went about his business smiling- tired- but smiling. That kind of reliability is imply invaluable to a project leader.

By this evening, I was wrestling with software and Bob could hear whales on the array. We will try and follow the sounds to the best of our ability- turning the boat and heading whatever way makes the clicks louder. I am confident we will find whales tomorrow as more of our tools will be working. I am confident my team will be in better shape as they have now had some time to come to understand how to manage the challenge of life on the boat.

John