

Day 37, Voyage 2, July 14, 2011

I guess I am buying the coffee.

Last night, I talked with Ian and Bob. The options were to either motor all night and head in - arriving late in the evening today, or drift all night- try for some more whales- and arrive tomorrow morning. We agreed on one more pass at the whales.

I awoke to a gray, stormy morning. Two of my team were queasy and one was wiped out. In addition, a big storm was looking to overtake us. The team was worn out, tired and ready for port. It looked like we lacked one key piece of information in our decision - very temporal local weather. We do assess weather, i.e. serious storms and hurricanes, but the local short storms we just have to ride out. It was going to be a long day, if this weather kept up. There were, however, many whales clicking on the array.

It cleared up around 10 am. Remarkably, whales were almost immediately spotted. I was working on a grant with Martha in our Office of Sponsored Programs on deck via my iPhone while searching for whales (thanks Martha). I sent my response to her and within a few minutes we had a sample. A little while after that we collected our second sample of the day, and then, our third. Now, the decision to stay looked good.

The effort brought our biopsy total on this leg is 42 sperm whales and 3 pilot whales for a total of 45 whales on this leg. I had told John Bradford that if we averaged 3 whale biopsies as day then I would buy him coffee. Something fancy, I imagine. So you see today worked well as its our 45th whale and we have been out here 14 days. Thus, our average is 3.2 whales per day. So I am buying the coffee.

For this year's voyage, combining the two legs, our overall total is 46 sperm whales, 3 pilot whales and 1 Bryde's whale for an overall total of 50 whales.

If you're curious about last year- last year's total was 43 sperm whales, 6 humpback whales, 2 fin whales and 1 Bryde's whale; overall total = 52. We won't see humpbacks here. Our plan is to sample them this fall off Ocean Alliance's other boat- Caribana.

Shortly before noon, Cathy came up from processing the second biopsy and pointed out to me that, considering all whales on both voyages, we had taken our 100th whale biopsy. A nice accomplishment for a small state university in Maine and a small nonprofit from Massachusetts working together on their first joint foray into marine toxicology field work. Thanks to all the participants in both voyages who have helped us achieve this landmark. Thanks to the funders for providing the means to do so. Thanks to all of you for keeping us sane during our trials and tribulations at sea.

We hit a couple of other notable marks too. Today is Bob's 25th anniversary of his first day on the Odyssey (back when it was a luxury yacht). Happy Odyssey day Bob! Today is Nate's 19th birthday (turns out we had 2 nineteen year-olds and an eighteen year old). Happy Birthday Nate!

We are in good shape heading into the second half of our expedition.

No sunset today- too many storm clouds. Instead, I have attached a picture of Johnny taking our last biopsy of the leg.

John

P.S. We are off Louisiana heading in. Our current location is 29 degrees 44.5 minutes North and 88 degrees 11.5 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): 29.445 N, 88.115 W

For those of you who are new to this email diary-the previous days can be found at: <https://cms.usm.maine.edu/toxicology/dr-wises-voyage-leg-summaries-2011>