

Day 41: August 26, 2010

Today was a slow day. By lunchtime we were in soup. Fog, rain and 3-4 foot waves. There was no visibility so we called off the watches. But to the team's credit they stood in the weather and rain looking very hard for any signs of whales. Rob mastered the midlevel platform and he and Johnny came down drenched from the rain.

By early afternoon, Captain Bob said the weather was not going to let up so we are headed into Bayou La Batre, Alabama, not far from Mobile. Apparently, that is where Forest Gump went shrimping in the movie by the same name. It's also a funny coincidence as Iain arranged it and I often call him Forest Gump for his knack of being in the middle of the action without always knowing it and the fact that he seems to know everyone everywhere.

There is a rough storm coming so we are not likely to be able to get out until Tuesday at the latest. Next Friday, Alexandra Cousteau is coming to the boat to celebrate some event tied to her grandfather Jacque Cousteau. Hopefully, we will have fresh sperm whale cells to show off. Scripps is now collaborating with us and will cover some voyage costs and in exchange we will service their sound buoys. A couple members of the team will learn these aspects too. Thus, the current plan is to be in for a few days waiting out the storm. Go out and service the sound buoy and upgrade our acoustic tools and then back in for Alexandra Cousteau and then back out again the next day with a crew change. That will be a bit chaotic.

The monkey brethren enjoyed the sunset- Rob and Rick are now fully integrated. We wonder who the next Monkey is... money is on Carlyne as she has her goofy side and she eats bananas... :), but Greg Wray has reserved a banana when he comes on. We'll see... One thing we again noted was the crazy number of oil rigs everywhere. Weird to be so far out and have a 'skyline'. Johnny said he counted 50 on his watch. Bob showed us a chart that showed the rigs as squares and it was so covered with squares, I am not sure you could count them all. Lots of oil being drilled out here in the Gulf.

Tonight we are also trying our first attempt at sediment sampling- me, Matt, Rick and Bob. Looks easy. Seems easy. But when one factors in currents and depth (trying to sample at 50-60 feet deep)- it's not easy. We are having a hard time telling when the grab sampler has hit bottom and the trigger that grabs should be released. That and the boat and the sampler drift differently in the current so we release the sampler at the stern and in minutes have to run to the bow to retrieve it. At the moment, we are searching for 50 feet as the first efforts were done at 60 feet and the boat drifted to 70 feet (the rope is only 70 feet or so) adding in the height of the boat and our rope was too short- hence we came up empty.

Stay tuned and we'll see if we hit pay dirt (pun intended this time)

John