

Day 5: July 21, 2010

Shortly after I wrote on Day 3, we lost all cell, internet and 3G signal. We knew then for practical purposes we were cut off from the real world though the boat would speak with Iain each day via satellite phone.

We are long the Hudson Canyon drop-off with 400 feet deep of water on one side of us and 4,000 feet on the other side.

On day 4, exhaustion hit us, all of us. Last night was a rough one with the biggest swells yet. No one slept much as they rolled around like soda cans on an every shifting skateboard. Superimposed on that was long days, hot weather and little appetite. We were struggling through the morning when Johnny called out from the mast "whale blow at 1 O'clock". That launched everyone into high gear and the exhaustion slipped from our minds. Everyone scrambled to their stations, Kyle to the mast station, Johnny to the foremost point of the bow, Rick shortly behind him. Kellie is in the bow area ready to take the Photo ID with Eric nearby to record the data. Bob was in the Captain's chair. Cathy was atop the pilot house. Matt was preparing the darts and grabbing the net. Me, I was alongside the port side of the pilot house everyone scanning for the whales.

As he stood in the bow, Johnny yelled back to me that he just saw a hammerhead shark off the bow. Hammerheads are one of five shark species known to attack humans. That raised my stress level some as I figured this moment would be the one where Johnny fell in. I am pleased to report he did not. The first attempt at the whale was from Rick and the whale was too far off so the dart missed. We then retrieved the dart and looked for the whales again.

We found them in short order. Three fin whales, reputed to be hard to biopsy because of their speed. The whales surfaced immediately adjacent to the bow. Johnny fired and Matt and I began the frantic search for the arrow in the water unsure if it was a hit or not. Peals of laughter came from the bow, but we could not see the arrow anywhere. It turned out the arrow bounced off the whale, sample inside, and straight back into the boat. The dart tip was passed to Cathy who immediately began the culturing process.

Next up was whale two. Johnny and Rick alternated places and the whale was on the starboard side. Again a clean hit and a nice sample and we had two whale samples. By then the third whale has swum off and it was back to the watch. Kellie ascended the mast. Cathy continued with the processing of now two whale tissues. Matt and Johnny collected water samples and tried once again for krill - no luck

By dark everyone was once again exhausted now further drained by a day in the fresh air and sun. I cancelled the early morning watches and called for an 8 am meeting to review progress. In that meeting, I will remind them to drink more water, wear more sunscreen and spend more time out of the sun.

There were a few remarkable moments in addition to the three hours spent focused on sampling the three fin whales and of course the hammerhead sharks. There were two different large groups of dolphins that swam by. There were these elegant blue fish that swam right up to the boat. We thought they might be dinner but alas we didn't catch any. And then there is the water. It is such a beautiful midnight blue- just marvelous, punctuated with brilliant clean white splashes from the boat and the animals in it. Truly a delight to behold.

Today is also my 20th wedding anniversary - Happy Anniversary Sandy! Here's to 20 more! We'll get to celebrate this one eventually.

John