

## Day 55: September 9, 2010

Wow! Wow! What a day! I woke up and the water was smooth and Captain Bob announced that the first person to spot a whale would get a piece of candy. Rick tossed in a large candy bar. At this point, so far from shore, the prize seemed worth the contest so I went up to look for whales and what did I find...? Johnny in the crow's nest, Carlyne, Sandy and Captain Bob on top of the pilot house. Ian steering the boat and Rick in the pilot house listening to whales. Matt was even hanging out of the pilot house door with binoculars. This group was determined to get their chocolate!

Within minutes, I heard Ian tell Johnny over the radio that whatever he just saw did not count. No idea what he said he saw. Then within seconds Matt called out that he had seen a whale blow. When I asked where they were, Ian said they were the same thing Johnny had seen. Apparently, Sandy too called out the whale blows at the same time as Matt, though I could not hear her from where I was. In the end, Ian determined that Matt and Johnny had tied and Sandy was disqualified as she did not radio her call in. They would get the chocolate. Sandy made a face in fun as Matt had also not radioed in because he had no need to do so as he was in the pilothouse where Ian could hear. But no one really cared about the chocolate because we had found whales... and boy did we find whales!

Everyone scrambled into position. Johnny came down from the crow's nest and he and Rick got their crossbows and headed to the bowsprit (our whale boom is undergoing repairs). Carlyne grabbed the camera and Sandy the data log sheet. Bob took the helm, Ian the midlevel platform and Matt and I prepared to take care of the arrows, scoop up the arrows and process the tissues. By 9:15 am, we had our first whale sample. By 9:45 our second. By noon we had 5 samples. There was a cacophony of clicking whales all day on the array.

At noon we had a brief break, well, call it more of a distraction. There was a large piece of plastic trash in the water and we decided to collect it. When we found it, we discovered a bunch of little and medium sized fish swimming underneath it. Captain Bob and Johnny then began an effort to catch those fish with a net and surprisingly within minutes Johnny caught one. Bob would steer the plastic with the gaff (a pole with a hook on the end) and Johnny would try to net them. Then Ian, from the midlevel platform spotted a school of mahi mahi fish. Matt quickly rushed to get a line in, but no luck as the lure on it was not meant for mahi mahi. He switched poles to get a better lure and Carlyne tried the first pole- still no luck.

Somehow we ended up with a switch, Bob got a pole and a lure and I took over steering the plastic. So then Matt and Bob were fishing for mahi, mahi and Johnny was netting for these small fish. Eventually Rick took over driving the plastic and I went on top of the pilot house. Suddenly, Bob had hooked a fish and it was large given the bend in the pole. But alas, it let go of the lure and the pole was empty. After a while Ian reported the mahi mahi gone and we turned our attention to grabbing some lunch. Carlyne made some nice tuna sandwiches for lunch and everyone was ravenous. Everyone but

Sandy, who was in the lab finishing up the sample processing as in the chaos of the morning, Matt and I had fallen behind and Sandy is much faster than we are at the process. Don't worry though- she too ate shortly after.

I noticed while I was eating and looking out the salon windows that Johnny sat alone in the bowsprit trying his hand at the mahi mahi for the first time. It reminded me of a day long ago when we spent the summers working in a field lab in Bar Harbor. Johnny went down to their dock to fish while I tended to business in the laboratory. After a while, he came tearing up the road to the lab, fish in hand smiling from ear to ear. It was his first fish caught on his own I think, a mackerel and we ate it for lunch. So there he was again determined to catch a fish.

I lost myself in some work, when I heard Ian exclaim, "He has got one on the line!" I went up to see and Johnny had a very large mahi mahi on his line. Ian helped get it within a couple feet of the deck when it broke the line and swam away. Back Johnny went to try again and again and again. Eventually, he landed a large one, though smaller than the first. Matt had also caught some smaller fish both with the net and I think the pole.

With the excitement of the fish subsiding, I reminded folks that we had to find whales and take a water sample. Matt suggested the guys keep on fishing while he and Carolyn took the water sample and then we could resume whales since we have to be stopped for water anyway. It was a good suggestion so we made it a plan. A little while later, Johnny caught a second mahi mahi, bigger than the first and with that everyone was ready to go. Within moments, someone spotted a whale and we were at it again. The afternoon brought another 5 whale samples. Whales everywhere.

Late afternoon we had a dilemma. We had two arrows in the water and two life rings in the water marking the locations of the arrows. We searched and searched and could not find them. The team started to wilt in the heat and suggested maybe they were just lost. But I assured them that we were required to keep looking and we would find them. The arrows were just too expensive to leave behind. After a while we did and all was retrieved. I realized then that we had a total of 24 biopsies since the start of the trip. I knew it had been a long day (it was now 6 pm and we had all been on whales since 8 am), but it was an achievable goal and 25 is a nice round number. All agreed and within moments, Rick spotted a whale and we were off. We got our 25th biopsy and 11th sample of the day!

We are all now exhausted though we had a nice dinner together at the end of the day.

As I look back on this day, there is so much I will remember, the many whales we saw, the mahi mahi we saw and caught, the sperm whale doing a full breach that only Carolyn and Sandy saw (so did it really happen!), the whale calf that swam up to the side of the boat I was on and was there just below me in full view in clear water, the dolphins on the bow that started our morning, the 11 samples, the large piece of plastic

with all the fish under it, and the array playing whale clicks loudly and all day. So many great things to remember.

But I think the thing I will remember most is the teamwork and the team spirit. This group of people put in 11 hours on whales in constant motion in the sun. Matt and I practically wore a groove in the boat floor we were up and down and around so much. But everyone did virtually every job and without any complaint.

Matt, Sandy and Carlyne all did data. Matt, Sandy and I all did the laboratory work. Matt, Rick, Sandy, Carlyne, Johnny and I all did net scooping. Matt, Johnny, Bob, Carlyne, and Ian all spent time up on the masts looking out for stuff. Matt, Carlyne, Sandy and I all did arrows. All of us spent time on top of the pilot house looking for stuff. Bob and Ian both drove the boat. Johnny and Rick took the biopsies. I think the only job not shared was Carlyne who took all the official pictures (though I got some with my iphone and Matt with his camera). Ian and Sandy took video. Everyone doing everything in constant and frenetic motion with Matt and me running everywhere all day as most other had fixed locations to work from most of the time. Hence the grooved floor in the boat. Just a great team effort with a great group of people.

In the end, it was interesting to note that we saw so many whales 110 mile southwest from Deepwater horizon. The oil supposedly did not reach here as the currents carried it east. The whales, however, do not recognize these distinctions as they traverse the whole region. But given how few whales we saw in the Gulf east of Deepwater Horizon-it makes you wonder why they are here. It's tempting to speculate that maybe they can see the oil and avoid it, but I don't think that is the case. Rather I suspect it was all of the ships and activity in the spill area that causes them to stay away and stay over here, but of course that is just a guess too. We will learn much in the coming months and now we are starting to build a critical mass of samples that will lead to critical data.

John