

## Day 68, Voyage 2, August 15, 2011

Whale call was early this morning - 3:45 am!

I had woken about 3 am and was working on a grant proposal in my head. Yeah, it happens sometimes. This one is about studying how cobalt-chromium hip implants are causing bladder cancer in people with implants. We plan to submit the grant in October. Anyway, I was up at 3. I checked my email and found several from my cobalt-chromium grant collaborator and one from the Mobile Baykeeper informing me that the white stuff we saw is washing up on the Alabama beaches-miles of it. They came to same conclusions we did and also don't know for sure what it is yet.

I went to the galley for a drink and found Captain Bob on helm watch. We chatted for a bit and I shared the Baykeepers comments with him. I headed back to my room and had just laid my head on the pillow and continued thinking of the grant when I heard a tapping. No one has ever come to my cabin in the middle of the night so I thought I was hearing things. But, to be on the safe side, I said "yes?"

Next thing I knew, the hatch in my ceiling opened and Captain Bob stuck his head in - "John, I have a whale blowing out here!" he said "Just off the side of the boat." There is nothing quite like the image of Captain Bob's head just above you in the middle of the night. But, the prospect of a whale overwhelmed my reaction to that image and I bolted for deck. Sure enough just a few yards of the boat - whale blows. Sandy arrived just on my heels.

It was a full moon so I asked Bob - "Think we have enough moonlight to biopsy?" He chuckled. After a few minutes I could see why. We could see the blows and hear the whale, but we could not see the whale.

We watched the blows and sounds circle the boat. At one point we could see the whale's silhouette under the water right next to the boat even possibly touching the boat under the water.

Johnny arrived in the pilot house as I was adjusting the camera on my phone. He looked none too pleased to see me disrupting his normal 4 am helm watch (his private time with the ocean) and was rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. "What are you doing up at this hour?" he asked.

"We've got a whale" I replied.

He looked at me dumbfounded and in disbelief.

"No, really" I said.

He bolted on to deck.

They say apples don't fall far from the tree when speaking of father and son. So you won't be surprised to learn that Johnny's next question was "Can we biopsy it?" I chuckled as Bob did and just like me Johnny realized why we couldn't.

We watched the whale until it left. Truly a memorable moment watching and listening to a whale in the moonlight. Picture of Johnny, Sandy and Bob looking over the side for the whale attached. Bob is in the middle in the shorts. Johnny is on his left and Sandy is on his right.

Our next excitement was during Laura and Cathy's watch. They spotted a water spout forming not far from the boat. Picture attached. The quickly came down off the mast. But, this was a fair weather water spout not a tornadic water spout so it posed little risk and was fun to watch. The entire team crowded into the pilot house to watch (it was pouring on deck).

The next excitement came in the afternoon. Believe it or not, the plane was back and NOAA was observing us again. This time many of the team were on deck looking at dolphins. This time the team was a bit annoyed at being the target of their observations. They still have not replied to my call.

While on deck, I noticed how hot it had become. Given that this was near the end of our trip, and perhaps, the last chance to swim in the Gulf this year, I checked with Captain Bob and we decided on a swim call. It was indeed refreshing. Ian and Johnny took advantage of the clear blue water to take images underwater with the GoPro camera. It was a nice ending to an unusual day.

Pictures of the sunset attached.

John

P.S. We are in the Gulf. Our current location is 28 degrees 05.7 minutes North and 85 degrees 02.7 minutes West, for those who want to track us as we go. For Google maps (not Google Earth - but maps) or Bing maps use (include letters and comma): 29.057 N, 85.027 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>







