



## **NOAA Fisheries Service Disentanglement Team Coordinator, Jamison Smith's Daily Blog**

**May 19, 2012**

We initiated being on watch looking for whales early Tuesday morning and it wasn't long until we had our first sighting of right whales! We launched the small Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) and proceeded to document each animal. We found 5 different individual whales feeding in the area. One was found to be entangled with a short piece of red monofilament netting coming from the animal's right side of the mouth. We tried to document as best as we could but the animal disappeared shortly thereafter and we didn't see it again the rest of the day. Based on the initial observation though, it looked to be a relatively minor entanglement. Hopefully we will see this animal again at some point in the cruise.

Wednesday was forecasted to be windy, foggy with occasional rain, and poor sea conditions...and the forecast was correct. We steamed through the night and anchored in Provincetown harbor Wednesday morning to get out of the swells and bad weather. These type of days are good opportunities to catch up on the data review and computer work. Later in the afternoon, the conditions improved slightly and we were able to launch the small RHIB and each take turns practicing biopsy sampling. The little orange buoy that we use for a target got beat up pretty good, we have some sharp shooters on this cruise!

Thursday we set sail again and conditions were very choppy with lots of whitecaps and swell with significant wind, not the recipe for good sighting conditions. However, once we rounded the tip of Racepoint in Provincetown and then followed the curve of the Cape around to the backside of the Cape, conditions started improving and got better through the day. We didn't see a lot of whales, some humpbacks right outside of Racepoint, and then the occasional spout off in the distance (we code these as Unidentified Large Whale, there were a few of these sightings this day). We also came across a few small groups (2-5 animals) of white-sided dolphins, but none of them were interested in us or our bow wake (sometime these small animals will ride the pressure wake coming from the bow of a boat or ship), maybe another day.

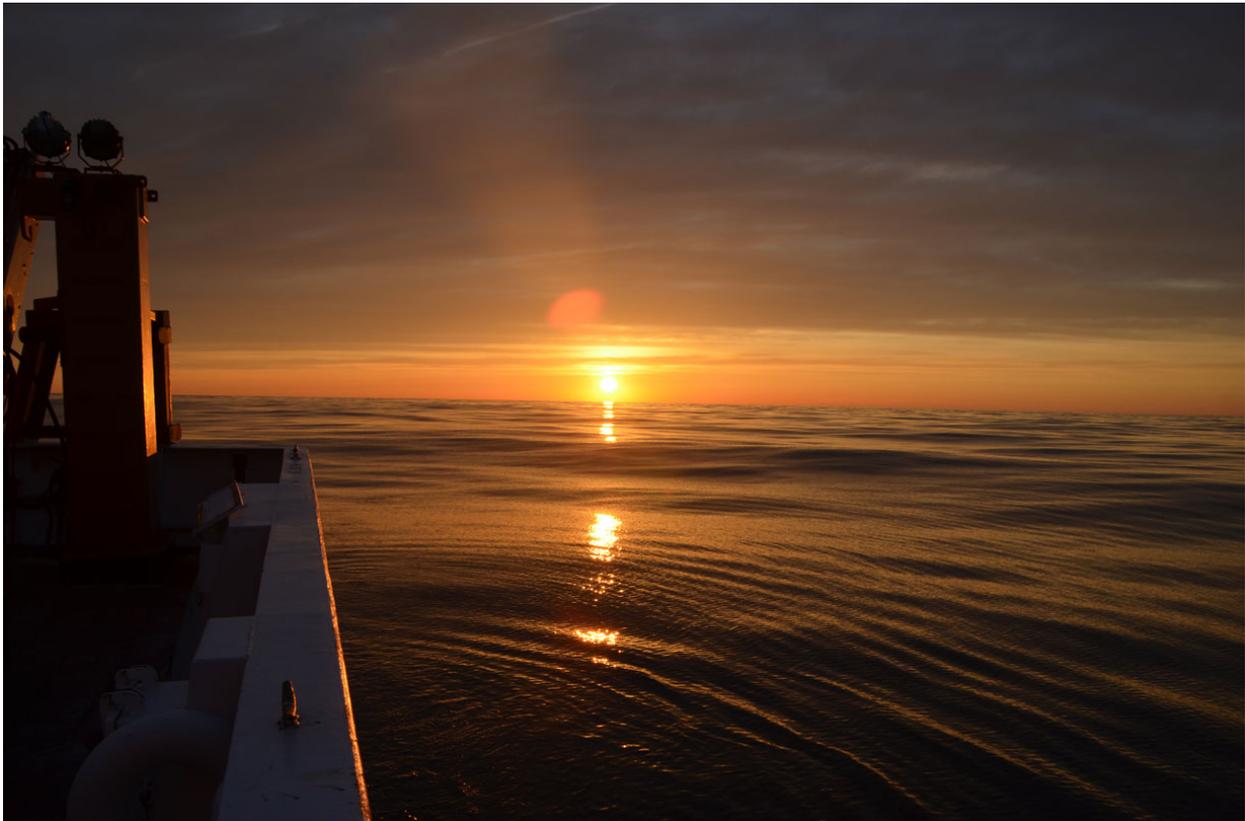


Right Whale



Sei Whale

Friday, our luck turned and the conditions turned out to be beautiful. This also proved to be true for feeding conditions. Mid-morning and throughout the afternoon, there were sei whales at all angles around the ship scattered around lunging and feeding at the surface. We also saw numerous basking sharks enjoying the plethora of food that must of been beneath us. To our delight, we were able to find at least 10 different right whales scattered amongst the sei whales. A couple of the right whales even appeared to be following, turn by turn, with some fo the sei whales, possibly feeding on overflow of prey coming out of the sides of the sei whale's mouth? Regardless, a great day of whale action and the day ended with a beautiful sunset off the back deck.



We have set the bar pretty high so far on this cruise and we are optimistic that our luck will continue and we'll find many more right whales.

Until next time...

Jamison

## **Day 1: May 15, 2012**

### **Cast off for the grand finale...**

Today was a bitter sweet time for many at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and for NOAA. There was an excitement in the air for the start of the second leg of the right whale abundance research cruise, especially since there have been numerous sightings of right whales by the NOAA survey plane in the past few days in the waters we are heading to (Cultivators Shoal), but today also marked the last official mission of the NOAA ship, Delaware II.

Commissioned for NOAA in March 1975, many people have sailed on this ship and called her home for periods of time. In fact, one person was overheard saying today, "It's a great old ship and I fully expected to retire from NOAA before her." I guess this could both be a testament of the level of



dedication and commitment that NOAA staff has to conserving the ocean's resources by spending entire careers studying the ocean and its marvels, or the inanimate bond that we have with our trusted ships as they take us to great lengths in our pursuit for knowledge -- sort of like a bond that I imagine a cowboy has with his trusted steed.

Once underway, we had a general safety and life aboard the ship briefing and met a lot of the ship's crew (a great group of people who run the ship, from driving the ship to cooking and everything in between). After the safety meeting, the day was spent getting familiar with the ship and where we will be calling home for the next few weeks. We also conducted numerous drills and exercises like: abandon

ship, fire, launching and retrieving of the small boats, etc. It was a great start to this momentous adventure, now all we need is to go find some whales....

Until next time,

Jamison