



EXPEDITION DIARY Azores 2011

By Jenny Kraushaar

25 March

Hello my name is Jenny and I will be your expedition leader on this year's Azores expedition - Fascinating creatures of the deep: Studying whales, dolphins and turtles around the Azores archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean.

I am writing this from Germany, where I have just packed up the gear and gone through the pre-expedition briefing (see video clip on www.facebook.com/biosphere.expeditions1 - and you don't need a Facebook account to watch this, just click on the link and go to the "Wall") and I look forward to flying to Horta next week. This will be my first time on this particular expedition, after many months of leading the Namibia project. If you are worried about seasickness, you are not alone, as I have a tendency to feed the fish too ;) so we can be green together. I keep telling myself that Nelson too suffered from seasickness...

I look forward to seeing the first team next week. My Portuguese mobile should be +351 96 2338060, but I will confirm this in my next e-mail from the Azores when I have switched the phone back on after a few months of lying dormant in a box. Please remember that this number is only for emergencies, for example missing assembly.

See you soon

Jenny Kraushaar
Expedition leader

3 April

A quick hello from the sunny harbourside at Horta (also see video diary at www.facebook.com/biosphere.expeditions1). Our local scientist Lisa is busy preparing the last datasheets and we are currently getting the boat ready for our 2011 expedition. The whales are around already and Lisa can't wait to get out, collecting new data as soon as possible. As the planes weren't on time over the last couple of days due to fog, please let us know about any delays as they happen by sending me a text or giving me a call on + 351 96 2338060. If you are already on the island, you are welcome to meet for lunch at around 11.30 at Peter's Cafe Sport. Otherwise we will meet at 13.00 the latest, at our base, Casa do Lado, as per the instructions in the dossier.

Until then...

Jenny (& Lisa)

3 April

Our scientist Dr. Lisa Steiner on a last quick video blog before the first team arrives - see www.facebook.com/biosphere.expeditions1.

6 April

With fog causing a few delays, happily everyone still managed to arrive in Horta on the afternoon of our first day. After a hot cup of tea we got stuck into our training, learning about the datasheets, boat safety and whale differences. A little unlucky with the weather, we only visited our catamaran, the "Physeter", without taking her out to sea. We did however receive all the instructions we need for being on board. The evening proved what a great team spirit there is amongst the team when everyone ordered the same dinner. The forecast looks good for wednesday and the baleen whales are close to the islands, so everyone is excited to head out and count their first whale blow rates.

9 April

Everyone went on the boat for the first time on a lovely sunny day on Wednesday and only 45 minutes later we spotted a bottlenose dolphin followed by a school of common dolphins. The waves continued to grow, but it was worth the ride, as we also came across four fin whales and a blue whale!

After an onshore day due to bad weather, on Thursday, we observed two more two blue whales on Friday. We've also learned how to match the flukes and dorsal fins of "our" cetaceans to a pan-European catalogue to check if our cetaceans have been seen elsewhere and we are now waiting for the matches to come back. It's a bit like working on a Scotland Yard DNA or fingerprint matching murder mystery and good fun.

12 April

The last couple of days have been very successful. We went out in mostly calm seas and our last day on board was all sunshine and smiles. The sperm whales kept us busy as 13 individuals came up within one hour. Susanne was lucky having Uwe as an assistant for counting all the whale blows around the boat and Elke put in a sterling effort to get good shots of the flukes for our photo ID catalogue. The evenings were spent at Peter's Café wondering how to spot a turtle within turtle time. This first group has had a remarkable run, sighting the three biggest whale species within a week: 20 different individuals of sperm whales, 4 fin whales, 3 blue whales, plus more than 1000 dolphins (common, striped and bottlenose) and even Risso's dolphins. Great work everyone and thanks for all your efforts.

16 April

Welcome to Faial, group 2. The forecast was good for Sunday, so we did most of the training on the first day, on Saturday, and then applied our new skills on board the day after. Rebecca and John were the first on POPA duty and experienced how busy it can get with datasheets. The day was very calm and we came across turtles, sunfish, Risso's dolphins, sei whales, sperm whales, common dolphins and even a flying fish! It was an amazing day. On Monday we decided to do some data entry and get some more information about whales and dolphins on shore as 32 knots of wind were just too much. We were also successful with matching flukes as two of "our" Sunday sperm whales have previously been recorded in 2003 and 2008 and one group 1 whale in October 2010. These kind of finding are very important for finding out about migration routes, group composition, etc. of sperm whales. Since sperm whales are true creatures of the deep, next to nothing is known about this,

So each piece of the puzzle we can add is important.

21 April

After a day onshore, hiking at the (volcanic) caldeira, exploring the volcano in a sandstorm and visiting the whaling museum at Horta, we left the harbour on Wednesday finding sperm whales which arrived here in December. A male group of Risso's dolphins that we only expected in September also came along to say hello.

In the evenings everyone is busy preparing the next day's jobs. On Thursday we decided to go out despite the stormy weather and were rewarded by coming across a female blue whale with a calf. So John fulfilled his lifelong ambition to see the biggest creature that has ever lived on Earth. In spite of the extremely arduous conditions, "all the brothers were valiant" (Captain Ahab, Moby Dick).

25 April

The sun appeared over Faial during the last few days and we were able to spot more sperm whales out at sea. Rebecca was very brave and joined us on board even with an injured foot. After we had prayed in the last week for a humpback whale to appear, we came across a creature we couldn't quite 100% identify, so we decided to trust our judgement and counted it as a humpback.

We also want to send a big hello to slot 1: we managed to finish the painting at the harbour (see picture on www.facebook.com/biosphere.expeditions1).

In the evening everyone was enthralled by a Spanish card game called "BURRO", where we definitely improved our reaction skills. On the last evening we celebrated our great results at Peter's and finished the last bottles of wine with smiles at Casa do Lado.

Thanks to all of you for all your efforts and a great & successful expedition. Hopefully we'll see you on another expedition soon.

Jenny Kraushaar
Expedition Leader

P.S. Don't forget to share your pictures via our Pictshare service - see www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictshare for instructions.