

VAQUITA EXPEDITION 2008

CHIEF SCIENTISTS:

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LORENZO ROJAS-
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CRUISE LEADER:

SHANNON RANKIN

SURVEY

COORDINATOR:

ANNETTE HENRY

SCIENTISTS:

RENÉ SWIFT

COLLABORATORS:

JONATHAN GORDON
NICK TRIGENZA
TOM AKAMATSU
SATOKO KIMURA

VESSEL:

CAPTAIN RODRIGO
OLSON OF THE
CORSAIR

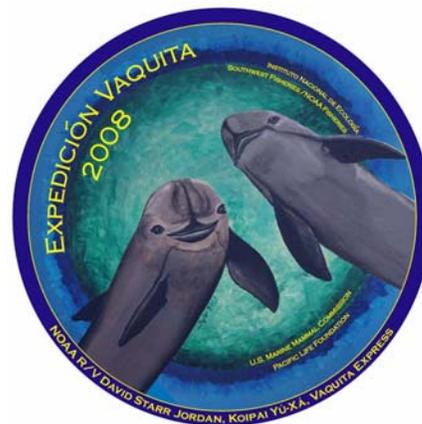


The Corsair 24, a high performance racing trimaran sailboat

CORSAIR REPORT

15 OCTOBER 2008

SHANNON RANKIN



Our peaceful weeks of solitude come to a crashing end as a government van full of international scientists arrive to stir things up a little. We have been joined by Jay Barlow and Barb Taylor (U.S.), Armando Jaramillo, Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho and Gustavo Cárdenas (Mexico), Jonathan Gordon and Nick Tregenza (U.K), and Tom Akamatsu and Satoko Kimura (Japan). All are experts in either acoustic studies of cetaceans and/or the vaquita, and all have come to join forces to determine the best way to tackle this problem of monitoring the population of this endangered porpoise.

The week could easily be divided into two halves: All Work or All Wind. The first half of the week was devoted to heated debates over the shortcomings of various methods, test runs on the *Vaquita Express*, and repeated tests of the reception of synthetic porpoise clicks on the various acoustic detectors. All in all, the first half of the week was extremely productive. In fact, it was near impossible to break these folks away from their computers long enough to enjoy some of San Felipe's finest fish tacos. After a few days of shore-based work, the plan was for the visiting scientists to board the NOAA ship *David Starr Jordan*. At this point, we would all perform daily tests of survey methods on our respective research vessels, with evening rendezvous on the Jordan to discuss the day's results. The Wind, however, had other plans.

The transition from the All Work to All Wind occurred with the visit of a hurricane named Norbert. Prior to Norbert, most of our international guests boarded the launch to join the *Jordan*. The winds associated with Norbert were followed by several days of sustained 40 knot winds. Needless to say, we spent long days on shore catching up on reports and data analysis and assisting Jonathan Gordon in the making (and breaking) of equipment for additional side-projects. Work in the field is ideally dominated by a rhythm—when the rhythm is broken (in this case by weather) – the day’s work is much more draining and wearisome.

Our time with the acousticians was coming to a close—and we had not had one encounter with our counterparts on the *Jordan* since they had left us. The weather granted us a reprieve just in time to schedule a final meeting before our guests were scheduled to leave. Armando Jaramillo shared his experiences of over a decade of studies on the vaquita, and then the discussion again shifted towards the benefits and shortcomings of the various techniques at our disposal. In the end, we agreed that a combination of methods, providing a careful balance of strengths and limitations, would provide us with the best strategy to examine the vaquita population. We were all optimistic about the hopeful recovery of the vaquita in light of upcoming changes to the local fishing industry, and we truly hope this recovery will be seen in the data we collect. No doubt the vaquita has benefited from this week of meetings of great minds, as have we on the *Vaquita Express*.

The time for discussions has now passed, and it is time for us to move on and begin what we came here to do: monitor the population of vaquita in the upper Gulf of California.



Sunrise and another lovely day in San Felipe. Clear skies once again bode well for the studies ahead!