

WEEK 4

This week started with bad weather and no dolphins in tracking range, and ended with our best day yet! We began the week by recapturing our focal dolphin a third time, to relieve him of his 'beacon' duties and tag a new focal dolphin. We successfully removed his tag, but then a squall moved in, and we had to abort operations before we could deploy a new tag. This unfortunately left us without any dolphins to track. But our previous radio-tracking efforts and the satellite tags suggested that the dolphins were remaining in a relatively well-defined area. So while waiting for the weather to improve during the following days, we cruised around taking hourly radio roll calls to see if we might bump into any of our other tagged animals. We did briefly pick up one of our tagged animals, but the signal was faint and we could not localize it before it faded away again.



The tracking has been very interesting, revealing just how fluid the dolphin groups out here are. During each set, we have tagged multiple animals, and although we have had three recaptures, none of the other tagged animals were recaptured during subsequent sets. In all cases, the animals caught, radio-tagged and released together have later moved on in different directions. On several occasions, dolphins whose signals we had lost were suddenly within range again near our focal dolphin, only to move off once more within minutes or hours. This pattern of continuous splitting up and coming together has made it very difficult to recapture dolphins other than the radio-tagged animal, as we had hoped to do. For the blood analyses, we are most interested in recapturing roto-tagged dolphins, because the small roto-tags are expected to have little or no impact on the animal. The larger radio tags can cause short-term changes in the blood that make it difficult to measure other potential changes.

But our luck changed on August 28, when we captured a small group of 15 animals, out of a huge school of about 2000 dolphins. We radio-tagged a new focal animal, and deployed one satellite tag and three small roto-tags. After we released our group of dolphins, they did not rejoin with the rest of the school (which headed south), and instead took us on a 2-day northward trek. The new focal dolphin decided to keep us rolling in the trough for most of the trip, and we have therefore named her 'Rocky'. On August 30th, a beautiful calm day, the helicopter team discovered that our small group of dolphins had found lots of company -- there were scattered dolphins everywhere, spreading for miles in all directions. With help from the trackers, the chopper team was able to find our tagged animal, and we quickly made a set to recapture Rocky. To our surprise, we caught one of the roto-tagged dolphins instead! This was great news, as long as we didn't lose track of Rocky, who got away that time. So we quickly sampled five dolphins, including the roto-tagged animal, and then tried to relocate Rocky. She had kindly stayed



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within radio range during the set, and by early afternoon, we caught her with another 30 animals! We retrieved her time-depth recorder, obtained another blood sample, and tagged fourteen additional dolphins. So all in all, a great but exhausting sampling day! We're now back to tracking Rocky (in the trough, of course), and we hope to make one more set on her soon. The seas have turned choppy again, so we will wait for another calm day before making our next set. To date, we have deployed a total of 27 roto tags, ten radio tags, and four satellite tags. The increasing number of first-time captures is providing a good range of baseline data for the physiological processes we are measuring, and we will continue to recapture animals, as conditions permit, to look at potential changes during repeated capture events. Stay tuned for more next week!