

**PICEAS – Pacific Island Cetacean and Ecosystem Assessment Survey**  
**Weekly Report, October 6 - 12, 2005**

*Lisa T. Ballance – Cruise Leader*

If you have ever spent a month at sea, particularly in the tropics, then you know well the first smell of land. It can come to you from a great distance away at times, or at others, will not reach you until the details of the browns, grays, and greens of things terrestrial can be seen with your unaided eye. But no matter the distance, the smell of rich earth is unmistakable, and overpowering after the sharp clean of salt air for so many days. This is the smell that greets us today, the last day of Leg 3.

Looking back, as striking as what we have seen during Leg 3, is what we have not seen. No sperm whales have surfaced on or near our trackline. Not a single school of striped dolphin, generally ubiquitous in tropical oceanic waters, has been logged. And still no whales of the genus *Mesoplodon* or *Kogia* have been detected since the beginning of PICEAS. While relatively rarely seen due to their shy nature, these animals are regular inhabitants of oceanic waters, so it is quite surprising that they have yet to make an appearance this year. In fact, in our 30 days this leg, we have logged a total of only 24 sightings – less than one per day, a statistic of which the marine mammal observers are painfully aware. This week, we managed to wrest two sightings from the sea, and worked hard on a third acoustic detection, which frustratingly never did appear (but we do believe our acousticians!). Our goal of reaching 200 sightings by the end of the leg will have to be moved back to Leg 4, but we have agreed to keep the project acronym unchanged, for now at least (earlier this week, there was talk of dropping the cetaceans from PICEAS, the acronym to become PIEAS – “What if they gave a cetacean survey and no cetaceans came?”). The big biological event of the week again goes to seabirds with the appearance of a rare storm petrel (see the Bird Blurb below), which not only brought the vast majority of scientists to the flying bridge, but received some dedicated ship time as well (yes, really Jay – you should have been here).

It is the end of Leg 3. My sincere thanks go to the officers, crew, and scientists aboard – a group of people as pleasant to work with as they are professional. I wish everyone a good few days of well-deserved R&R in Honolulu and surrounds. And to James Cotton, who is marrying his long-time sweetheart of 16 years during this import – Congratulations!


**SWTSC Marine Mammal Sighting Form**

Date 05/16/05 Cruise # 1629 Sighting# 103  
 Time 1629 Effort ON Observer # 93

SPECIES or CODE  
177  
049

SPECIES DETERMINATION	COUNT	ASSOCIATED ANIMALS: List ID and number of other species near the sighting.
1. Unid. small delphinid	177	
2.		
3.		
4.		

DIAGNOSTIC FEATURES: Describe and sketch the shape, size and markings of the species identified.



Smallish delphinid, 2.0-3.0m, one  
 big splash and long animal seen twice

A typical cetacean sighting during this past week of Leg 3, PICEAS.

### Marine Mammal Sighting Summary

100605	0706	N10:59.77 W169:23.85	89.3 nmi	4.6
	1856	N12:13.14 W168:31.75		
100705	0705	N13:07.92 W167:55.01	107.9 nmi	5.1
	1849	N14:38.03 W166:53.94		
100805	0656	N15:36.18 W166:14.62	95.2 nmi	4.4
	1837	N17:10.63 W165:08.25		
100905	0651	N18:05.51 W164:30.88	91.0 nmi	4.1
	1828	N19:32.16 W163:30.44		
101005	0657	N18:01.18 W163:19.73	26.3 nmi	6.0
	1036	N18:18.20 W162:48.81		

CODE	SPECIES	TOT#
049	ziphiid whale	1
177	unid. small delphinid	1
	TOTAL	2

### **Acoustics Squeakly Report** (Shannon Rankin & Sara Heimlich)

The week started off with the kind of excitement most people only dream about. As soon as the array was in the water, we started to hear whistles. The chaos was overwhelming-- could it be? Yes! This sounded like a healthy school of *Psuedorca crassidens*-- our target species! Unfortunately, there were SO many whistles that we were unable to get an exact location before they passed the beam. And no sooner had they passed the beam than we made change of course-- but alas, the little buggers went silent. And stayed silent. \*sigh\* Several hours later, we finally gave up, but not without some hearty effort (thanks observers!).

Then, it was back to the usual-- our winch broke, threatening to drag the entire array to oblivion and taking the acousticians with it. End of story (for this leg, at least!)

### **Birder Blurp** (Michael Force & Sophie Webb)

That's all it took—it was that easy. All I had to do was utter those four magic words: “LET’S TURN ON IT!”, and it was so (maybe I should try that more often!). I admit I was manipulating the intoxicating excitement that had enveloped the flying bridge and working the delirium to our advantage, but having a bird observer in the guise of a senior mammal observer certainly didn't hurt. The White-throated Storm-Petrel that highlights this week's report was the first for PICEAS and came at a time when mammal sightings were as scarce as a tanned polar bear. Perhaps that explains the gaggle of rubbernecks who came up for a look at the avian speck bouncing across the waves. The pelagic dispersal of this southern hemisphere storm-petrel (also known as Polynesian Storm-Petrel) is a bit of an enigma, hence our surprise at seeing one so far north. This was yet another fabulous week for the seabird department as fall migration continues to have a positive effect on our species diversity. Not just northern hemisphere breeders moving south for the winter, but southern hemisphere breeders moving south for the summer. That includes jaegers—we had another Stercorariid Grand Slam—all four in a single day (Pomarine, Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers and South Polar Skua), as well as many Mottled Petrels and Sooty Shearwaters. We also experienced high numbers of Black-winged Petrels, likely on the move to their southwestern Pacific nesting islands. Two of these lovely birds stranded on board and were released unharmed. In total, we found 28 species this week, including a Flesh-footed Shearwater and a Stejneger's Petrel within the Hawaiian EEZ and the fourth Wilson's Storm-Petrel for the cruise. We might have had 29 species if that large mysterious storm-petrel had remained long enough to be identified...Tristram's perhaps? We'll keep our eyes peeled for it next leg!

**Biopsy Weekly Report** (Suzanne Yin and Robert Pitman)

	<b>Weekly Total</b>	<b>Cruise Total</b>
Bryde's whales	0	1
Pilot whales	0	2
Humpback whales	0	3
Melon-headed whales	0	40
Sperm whales	0	4
False killer whales	0	18
Spotted dolphins	0	2
Spinner dolphins	0	3
Rough-toothed dolphins	0	2
Bottlenose dolphins	0	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>86</b>

**Photo-ID Weekly Report** (Chris Cutler and Beth Goodwin)

	<b>Weekly Total</b>	<b>Cruise Total</b>
Humpback whale fluke IDs	0	4
Bryde's whale	0	4
Melon-headed whale (# groups)	0	3
False killer whales (# groups)	0	3
Pilot whales (# groups)	0	12
Striped dolphins (# groups)	0	2
Spotted dolphins (# groups)	0	4
Spinner dolphins (# groups)	0	5
Fraser's dolphins (# groups)	0	2
Killer whales (# groups)	0	1
Risso's dolphins (# groups)	0	1
Rough-toothed dolphins (# groups)	0	1

## Oceanographic Data Collections (Mindy Kelly and Lacey O'Neal)

DATE RANGE	DAY	CTD	XBT	Bongo	Manta
PICEAS05 Leg 3  10/06 to 10/11	Thursday	2	3	1	1
	Friday	2	3	1	1
	Saturday	2	3	1	1
	Sunday	2	3	1	1
	Monday	1	4	0	0
	Tuesday	0	4	0	0
	Wednesday	---	---	---	---
	<b>Totals</b>		9	20	4

There once was a cruise called PICEAS  
In search of cetaceans we sailed the high seas  
But n'er did we find dolphin or Whale of any kind  
Thank goodness my paychecks come from CTD's

## Fish Follies (Robert Pitman and Jim Cotton)

Watch this space.

## Post Script:



James gets a surprise Bachelor Party.