



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
Christopher Monsour
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
June 12 – July 12, 2007**

NOAA Teacher at Sea: Chris Monsour
NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
Mission: Lobster Survey Western Hawaiian Islands
Day 5: Sunday June 18th, 2007

Science Log

Yesterday and today were very busy days on board OSCAR ELTON SETTE as we set our first traps, cut bait and then pulled up traps and collected the lobsters, eels, sharks, and whatever else made it into the traps. Yesterday we set 160 traps off of Maro Reef. We set 10 lines of 8 traps and 4 lines of 20 traps. Each trap was assembled and 2 mackerel, which had been cut into thirds, was placed into the baiter. The baiter is a small container within the trap that holds the bait. The bait was cut earlier in the day. I volunteered to cut bait and I spent about an hour slicing and dicing the mackerel. Once the traps were baited we spent about an hour setting the traps. The traps were stacked into groups of fours and I would hand a trap to a fisherman who was standing on the stern and watch as the traps were pushed off into the water. I wish I could say my day was done but there was still a lot to do before tomorrow, including getting more bait.



Teacher at Sea Chris Monsour, holds up one of the large Uku that was caught. The fish will be used for bottomfish studies.

Every night about 2100, the “crackers” for the next day go into a walk in freezer and pull out 13 boxes of frozen mackerel to thaw. (The term “cracker” comes from the job of opening up the traps when they are pulled out of the water, one has to crack open the lobster trap and pull out whatever is in side.) The next morning I got up at 0545 to cut the bait. The other cracker for the day was Matt and we spent a good hour cutting up the mackerel. I did learn that it is much easier to cut a half frozen mackerel as opposed to a thawed out mackerel. The knives were kind of dull

and the mackerel were full of blood and eggs and there were a few times where the mackerel ended up on my shirt. No problems though.

The processing of pulling up 160 lobster pots takes up the good portion of the day so I will keep it simple. Once the pots are pulled from the water and end up on the deck they first come to the crackers. The crackers open the pots and remove all organisms from inside. Today, this included slipper lobsters, spiny lobsters, eels, sharks, crabs, fish and one octopus. The most difficult had to be the octopus, it just refused to come out and its tentacles stuck to every surface. It took both Matt and me to pry the octopus from the trap. We both tried to avoid the mouth because they do have a beak like structure and neither of us wanted to see if it could remove a finger. The spiny lobsters were also difficult because one, they are covered with spines but are a lot stronger than one would think. They would kick back with their tail and one time my pinky got caught by tail and blood was drawn. The slipper lobsters are easier to handle and taking them out the trap was not a problem because their bodies lack the spines. Most of the lobsters that were pulled out were the slipper lobster, which are also the easiest to handle. The worst part of the job as cracker is constantly being wet and having to dunk my hands in the bait



Teacher at Sea Chris Monsour sorts through a trap that was brought up off the Maro Reef.

buckets which are full of mackerel blood and organs. The smell of the mackerel has found its way into my shoes, gloves, hair, and skin. I don't think I will ever be able to get rid of it. My job as cracker ended and tomorrow I start as a runner. Everyone who has done this cruise before says cracker is the best job. I guess I will soon find out.

Personal Log

I would be lying if I said I was not tired. The job of cracker is not the hardest job, but when one has their hand in a trap that has eels, sharks, and spiny lobsters in it, it can be stressful. On top of emptying the traps, the old bait has to be removed and new bait placed in, all the while, a new trap is making its way down the table. So after eating dinner at 1630, I am ready to call it a day. By

keeping so busy I have not had as much time to sit on the observation deck and look for whales and dolphins, but I have come face to face with some really amazing animals. I

am really fascinated by the eels. They are very aggressive and strong animals. I almost had one get real personal with me when I was emptying a lobster pot and the eel had managed to hide on the bottom. As I was picking up spiny lobster, this eel pops it head up by my hand and all I could say was EEL! EEL! Everyone had a good laugh. We ended the day with a feeding frenzy in which all of the old bait is dumped over the side and the Galapagos Shark's come in. It is an amazing sight to see and to be that close to such a great animal. I am sure there will be many more moments like that to come.

Animals Seen Today

Spiny lobster	Crabs
Slipper lobster	Lemon Head Eel
Galapagos Shark	Uku
Reef Shark	
Hermit Crab	

Question of the Day

Looking at the food web of The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, what would happen if a large predator like the Galapagos Shark was removed? Would there be another animal that could replace it in the web?

Aloha...
Chris