



**NOAA Teacher at Sea**  
**Kimberly Pratt**  
**Onboard NOAA Ship MCARTHUR II**  
**July 5 – 24, 2005**

**Interview 1**

“Capt. Cotton of the Flying Bridge”

Entering the Flying Bridge on the MCARTHUR II is to enter into Jim Cotton’s personal playground. Laughter fills his face and excitement abounds as he listens to Johnny Cash and looks through the “Big Eyes” telescopes (25 power telescopes that enable the viewer to see over 7 miles) to see what he loves most of all - marine mammals.

Jim’s reputation preceded him on this cruise as one of the finest marine mammal observers to be found. Jim is a Senior Mammal Observer with NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association). He’s been working for NOAA since 1978 and his primary responsibilities are; Field Biologist, Observer, Flying Bridge quality control, data editing, and photo biopsy.



Jim’s background is a BA in Zoology, BA in Biology and a minor in Botany, all received at Humboldt University. One of his most rewarding projects was collecting flying fish in the East Tropical Pacific and helping Bob Pittman collect 35,000 samples to work on a new taxonomy (classification system) for flying fish.

Jim has always wanted to be a biologist, and his dedication to his field is evident. However, it’s not easy being a field biologist and the hardest part is the time spent away from his daughter who is studying business and also away from his sweetheart of 15 years. Yet, he believes the sacrifice is worth it. One of the most motivating factors in his career is being able to look at animals that few people will ever see. He encourages all people to follow their dreams and especially students to learn to write well, learn computer science, and have a background in statistics. Finally, in a laugh and big smile Jim simply says, “I have the best job in the world”. That says enough...

Questions answered by Jim Cotton.

Sarbjit, 5th grade:

How will you peel the skin from the whales and dolphins (for biopsy)?

Jim: Their skin is very thin like a cuticle on you finger. It can be cut with a scalpel. When we do a biopsy the animals don't do avoidance behavior (running away) so it doesn't look like it bothers them. Actually, it spooks them more if you don't hit them and it splashes into the water.

Michelle – 5th grade: How do dolphins communicate with other dolphins?

Jim: They use echolocation, sending off a sonar wave and having it hit an object and bounce off back to them. They also use their vision, they look around and lastly many are brightly colored allowing them to see each other more easily'

Michelle – Do young dolphins hunt their own food?

Jim: Actually it is a learned behavior the parents teach their young. There were school of Spotted dolphins in the Gulf of Mexico that he observed being taught how to hunt. Killer whales had surrounded prey, kept them corralled as the mother dolphins taught their babies how to hunt the prey inside of the corral. In the end the big male Killer whale ate the prey, but it gave the dolphin's good practice at hunting.

Michelle: What do dolphins eat?

Jim: The eat fish, squid; the Killer Whales eat marine mammals.

July 9,2005  
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