



NOAA Teacher at Sea
David Riddle
Onboard NOAA Ship ALBATROSS IV
July 13 – 28, 2006

NOAA Teacher at Sea: David Riddle

NOAA Ship ALBATROSS IV

Mission: North Atlantic Sea Scallop Survey

Day 5: Monday, July 17, 2006

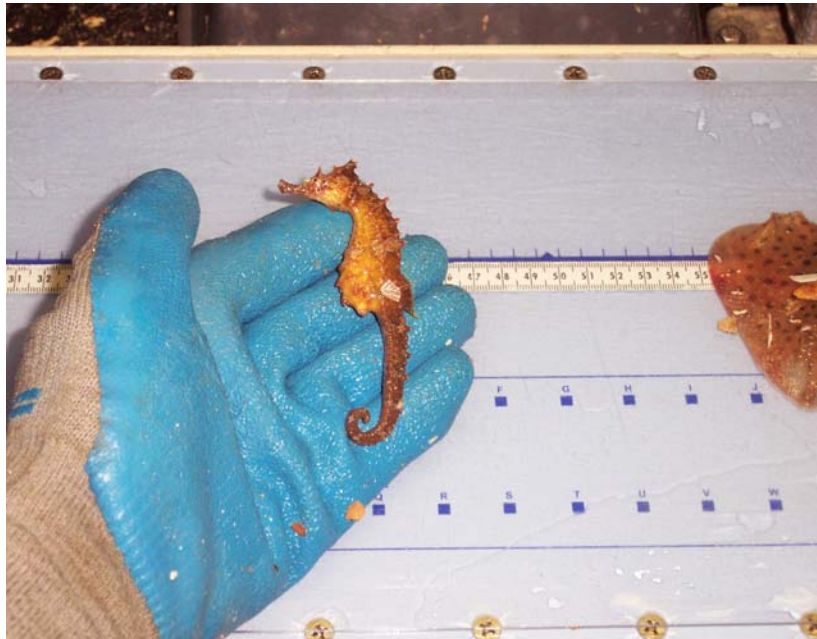
Science Log

It's almost halfway through my watch now, and I have a little down time. The day started with several stations that were close together, which kept us busy. Now the sampling stations are farther apart, and I've had time to work on some photographs of shells.

Our catches turn up lots of interesting creatures. Some I recognize from my college invertebrate zoology course (oh, so many years ago!)

Others I've only seen

pictures of. There are occasional sea squirts, bulbous little creatures that squirt a stream of water when squeezed. We find an occasional "sea mouse", a polychaete worm, bristly-looking on the backside and shaped sort of like, well, a mouse. Underneath you can see the segments. Hermit crabs are abundant; many of them simply abandon their shells when they're dumped onto the deck. This is probably not a good survival strategy, since they get dumped back overboard only to drift slowly to the bottom without any protection at all. Oh well, most everything in the ocean is somebody else's lunch anyway. We find other species of crabs as well. The larger ones are set aside and are sitting in a bucket which has seawater continually being pumped through it to keep them alive. I wonder whose lunch they'll turn out to be? We've caught a few small dogfish sharks, under two feet in length. I'm told on some of the ground fish surveys they catch tons of them (literally). Considerably smaller were two needlefish, about 6 inches long and ¼ inch wide.



A seahorse that came up with the dredge

I find myself wondering things like, “What must it be like to be that small, living in this huge ocean?” Then I’m reminded of our little planet’s location in our galaxy, and the Milky Way’s tiny place in a universe with millions of other galaxies. OK. Humility is a good thing.

Then too, I’m reminded that small is not always equivalent to unimportant. Do you like breathing? Well, consider that roughly 3 out of every 4 breaths you take come to you courtesy of the phytoplankton in the oceans of the world. There they are, soaking up the sunshine and the carbon dioxide and pumping out huge quantities of oxygen every single daylight hour. They’re microscopic, but their importance in the overall scheme of life on this planet is enormous. I suppose it would be helpful to remember, while we’re busy saving the whales, we should take care of the little guys too. But then, how would “Save the Plankton” look on a T-shirt or bumper sticker?

On a more practical note, we’re due to reach our turn-around point in 5 more stations. We will have reached our southernmost latitude, which will put us due east of the North Carolina-Virginia border. Then we’ll begin making our way back up the coast, stopping at the stations in shallower waters. I flew to Boston from my home in western NC to take part in this Teacher at Sea experience. So this is the closest to home I’ll be for the next 12 days.

I keep thinking I’m done with my log for the day and then something else happens. At station 99 we caught a seahorse! The depth was 24 fathoms, and I seriously doubt it was on the bottom, but when the dredge came up, there it was on deck.

Sightings: The osprey was still here this morning, but as of late afternoon it was gone.