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Zanesville teacher returns from reef fish sampling research trip

John Taylor-Lehman, a science teacher at Tri-Valley High School, returned today from seven days of assisting scientists sampling reef fish, including snappers and groupers, off the southeast coast of the United States. The snapper-grouper complex, which includes red snapper and red and gag grouper, is one of the most commercially and recreationally important fisheries in the region.

"I felt very fortunate to have been selected as a new member of the Teacher at Sea program and provided the opportunity to work alongside fisheries scientists and crew," said Taylor-Lehman. "My classroom was a ship and my learning came from the daily work I was assigned by the chief scientist. My time at sea was an educational and exhilarating experience which I hope to be able to translate into hands-on lessons for my students related to science careers, research technology, and current environmental issues impacting the ocean."

Taylor-Lehman boarded the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography research vessel *Savannah* in Savannah, Ga on June 24. He assisted scientists as they trapped and examined fish and used a video camera mounted on the trap to record the habitat and the number of fish in the area. Certain organs and bones in the fish can provide information on age, growth, and sexual maturity, and this data is used for population assessments and models. With commercial and recreational fishing for red snapper closed because of concerns about the population size, scientists must rely on data coming from scientific surveys, rather than from fishermen.

Taylor-Lehman kept a blog during the research mission, accessible at <http://teacheratsea.noaa.gov/2011/taylor-lehman/>. Photos from his blog are free and available for use by media with proper crediting.

"NOAA's Teacher at Sea program immerses teachers in hands-on research experiences that give them clearer insight into our ocean planet, a greater understanding of maritime work and studies, and increased knowledge of environmental literacy," said Jennifer Hammond, the program's director. "Participating in real-world research allows teachers to gain experience actually doing science, which makes a significant impact when they bring back their knowledge to their classrooms, teaching students how the oceans affect their lives."

Now in its 21st year, the program has provided over 600 teachers the opportunity to gain first-hand experience participating in science at sea. This year, NOAA received applications from more than 250 teachers, and chose 33 to participate in research cruises. The educators chosen are able to enrich their curricula with the depth of understanding they gain by living and working side-by-side, day and night, with scientists studying the marine environment.

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