



The 2005 Bimini field season came to a close on 28 August, when Darcie Blanding and Kelly Melillo left Bimini and returned to Connecticut. The season, spent aboard Bimini Undersea's Wild Dolphin Excursions, was a great success. Here's a wrap-up of how things went:

The season began with our return to Bimini on 29 May 2005. Bimini is a very small island and is the most westerly of the Bahamian island chain. Bimini lies just 50 miles off the coast of Florida, yet it feels a world away and it is where we have called home for the summer.

As we have with each field season since DCP began its work here in 2001, we spent our time accompanying eager tourists who have come to swim with wild dolphins with Bill & Nowdla Keefe's Bimini Undersea. We were first on the boat on 5 June 2005 and many days after that! June was rainy, July was busy and August ended with Tropical Storm Katrina, but between all of this, we were able to complete 43 boat trips. These resulted in 187 hours, 21 minutes of total effort (time on the boat, looking for dolphins). 86.36% of our trips resulted in sightings and 56.82% had encounters. There were a total of 75 dolphin sightings and 45 encounters. We collected video and acoustic data using Kathleen's very first MVA, as well as taking digital still photographs for the photo-identification catalog. This year, we were able to record 389 minutes of video. Since these are wild dolphins, they are often coming in and out of view while we are in the water. Therefore, of this video, there are over 160 minutes with dolphins actually in view.

We've re-identified 26 of the 76 spotted dolphins in the 2004 catalog. The now updated 2005 catalog has 79 animals as we were able to add 3 new dolphins to the catalog. DCP ID# 80 is a young class 3 (juvenile) female and has already been named "Leslie" and is now available for adoption. DCP ID# 81 was given to a young calf who is missing part of its fluke. And, DCP ID# 82 goes to an adult female, who is also missing part of her fluke and has a dramatic notch missing from her dorsal fin. #82 was seen from the boat during the 2004 field season, however, was not seen underwater until now. After being able to observe her spot pattern, we determined that she was not already entered into the catalog... but, now she is!

Each week, we also provided casual presentations to boat passengers. These presentations included a more thorough introduction to DCP, our personal theses and generalities of dolphin behavior. It was also one of our favorite parts of the week! Thanks to all of our passengers for their enthusiasm, questions and respect for the dolphins.

We also extend our thanks to Bill and Nowdla Keefe and the Bimini Undersea staff who were professionally welcoming and great friends throughout the summer. Also thank you to our landlord, Lorenzo Saunders and the rest of the residents of Bimini for their hospitality. We are now looking forward to returning to school and our individual Master's research projects. And of course, we are looking forward to returning to the island for the 2006 Bimini field season!

-Kelly Melillo and Darcie Blanding
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