

## M/V *Tigla* 2009 Field Season Report

### Observations

This year's activities began on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May with our annual GLOBEC charter trip to the Gulf of Alaska. We were greeted with some of the nicest weather of the year. The ocean was calm for the entire trip which allowed us to complete all transects in the Gulf and Prince William Sound. In 2008 we were able to complete only 9 of the 13 stations of the Gulf Of Alaska Line due to inclement weather.

Our Fish & Wildlife field season began on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May. Our first major oceanic observation occurred while we were entering the Shumagin Island group on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Transiting 12 Fathom Strait, we

began to encounter a few humpback whales with numerous shearwaters. As we proceeded to the east on the north side of Bird Island, the numbers had increased so much that we had to just stop the vessel in awe of the congregation of shearwaters, 10's of thousands of kittiwakes, about 50



humpback whales and fin whales that seemed to be enjoying the bounty of the sea. The color sounder was red indicating the abundance of prey in the water column. This congregation of seabirds and marine mammals is similar to what we have witnessed in Unimak Pass in late August early/ September. Generally we do not transit this area in the spring, as our route historically takes us north of the Shumagin's next to the Alaska Peninsula. Whether or not this observation is an annual event or a "hot spot" needs to be determined. It will be a target for us next spring to see if the area yields the same observation.

Our marine mammal observation methods on board changed. In the past, we had a written format that was kept in a note book. This year we began to make our observations electronically on the laptop which made the process quicker to record and more convenient. Therefore, the number of marine mammal sightings went up considerably when compared to last year. The numbers of whales for the year were humpbacks (139), fins (50), sperm whales (18), minkes (32) [16 of which were seen at Massacre Bay near Attu in one day], and killer whales (39). One of these humpback whales was seen in the Near Island group between Shemya and Agattu and that is a rare sighting that far west. Another interesting sighting happened during the sea lion cruise. We were bound for Shaw Island, which is near Cape Douglas on the Alaska Peninsula, where we expected to encounter Steller sea lions and instead we

found over 300 harbor seals all congregated on the northwest end of the island. To see that many together on one island again is quite a rare sight for us aboard *Tiglaġ*. Our annual tally for short-tailed Albatross for the year ended at (9) with the majority being seen at Ingenstrem Rocks (as usual). The one that left the biggest impression was the tagged juvenile following the ship as we left Buldir for the final time in 09 (above photographed by Ray Buchheit).

### ***Tiglaġ* Facts for 2009**

- Days at sea: 135
- Miles Traveled: 14,701
- Passengers: 157
- Ports Of call: 6 Adak, Akutan, Homer, Kodiak, Seward, & Unalaska
- Dockings : 37
- Field camps supported: 13
- Countries represented: 3- Australia, Canada, and the United States
- Federal user groups: Dept of Agriculture & Agri- food (Canada), AVO, NOAA, NMML, USFW, USGS, National Park Service
- NGO's: Akutan Native Assn., Island Conservation, and Ounalashka Corp.
- Press: Anchorage Daily News & Alaska Magazine
- Universities: Charles Stuart University ( Australia), Humboldt University, Memorial University, (Canada), Oregon State University, University AK Anchorage & University AK Fairbanks
- Refuge projects supported: annual seabird monitoring camps (3)  
Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystems Research Project at Bogoslof  
Fox eradication at Rootok Island  
Hydro-acoustic and pelagic seabird transects at Kasatochi  
Kasatochi eruption studies  
Kittlitz's murrelet telemetry project  
Invasive species survey Tangik, Poa, & Wosnesenski  
Level 1 contaminants survey at Tanaga  
Logistical support at Adak  
Marine mammal sea otter surveys in the Near & Rat Island groups  
Rat Island assessment  
Sanak Island fox re-check  
Seabird colony mapping in the Near Islands & Rat Island groups  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife archeological & botanical Surveys

## Highlights

**Cabin Clean-up:** We began a cleanup of unused fox trapper's cabins that are on refuge land but are not listed as property. They were only temporary shelters used for the eradication of foxes on that island for specific years. We began on the island of Attu and did it in conjunction with other work in the Near Islands. There were two cabins left on island: one in Abraham Bay and the other in Etienne Bay. With the help of members of the science and boat crews these cabins no longer exist.



This project is the first of many to be done along these lines on the refuge and leaves one with a feeling of satisfaction that you have completely finished your project. As stated by Jeff Williams, “My goal is to leave the refuge in a better place” and here you can see an example of his effort.

**Acoustic listening device recovery.** We had another situation where we finalized a project on the refuge but this time it was not on land.... it was on the ocean floor. In 2008 the *TiglaX* assisted the National Marine Mammal Lab in putting out acoustic listening devices at three Steller sea lion rookeries to listen for killer whale activity near the rookeries. These devices were set up with acoustic releases that were to be activated by a frequency transmission from the shipboard device to free the buoy from the seafloor at a later date. After spending a year submerged, the releases became inoperable due to marine growth on the device. While the vessel was on charter to NMML, we were asked if it was possible to recover the device manually. The device was in 25 fathoms which made it unreachable by divers. Refuge policy is “No Decompression” dives and that would be the case if we were to dive to that depth so it left us with only one choice: to drag the ocean floor and try to snag the device and haul it aboard with our winches. If the device was detached from its mooring it would float because the configuration had flotation above the acoustic device. So the objective was to drag a device made by the

crew that would hook into the cable that moored the listening device to its anchor. First we had to locate the device on our sonar, and once that was accomplished, we determined at what height of the ocean floor we should tow the grapple in order to snag the device at its weakest point, the thin wire that connected it to the mooring. The concept at this point was to snag it where the wire would be pinched, and with the momentum of the ship towing it, the mooring wire would break and release it from the mooring and she would float to the surface. After 2 days and nine attempts we recovered it from near the Sugarloaf rookery in the Barren Islands with the acoustic device and its floatation intact. The data was saved!



**Kasatochi Volcano Studies** Another refuge project that took a portion of *Tiġlaġ* field season was revisiting Kasatochi. It was visited twice during the year. Crews were brought ashore to inspect the habitat of the island and to set up monitoring devices to record the pulse of the island after its destructive volcanic eruption the year prior. It was a group effort from a number of agencies collaborating to learn more about what happened and what survived after the series of eruptions in August 2008. It was an excellent example of partnerships working together. After 7 days of extensive studies of both the terrestrial and marine environments, I can only say generally that there is life after a pyroclastic eruption, but not much. The birds returned to the island only to find a completely different environment than what they were used to and subsequently their behavior was modified. There were a few plants and bugs discovered on island. The ocean floor had just a sliver of kelp beginning in an area where it used to be prolific. How long the rejuvenation process will take I'm sure will be discussed in the papers that are soon to be published. The eruption from a navigator's perspective did change the way we approach working the island as there are now places to land on the island that were never an option in the past. There are new beaches although they eroded drastically in just one season. That process will probably continue, leaving us a new shaped island to investigate next year.

## New Projects

**On Board Recycling:** It was the beginning of a new era on board; there were two shipboard projects that began this year that deserve attention. The first was our full scale recycling program. In the past we were only recycling aluminum cans but this year we branched out to cardboard, mixed paper, plastic and alkaline batteries. This proved to be a challenge because Homer was the only full-recycling facility so we could only deliver once in mid-season and again at the end of the field season. The crew managed to fill bins in the hold with trash as the field camps were removed from the hold. Finally tally : 445 lbs of corrugated cardboard, 180 lbs of mixed paper, 60 lbs of aluminum cans, 20 lbs of alkaline batteries and 8lbs of #1 plastic and 8 lbs of # 2 plastic.

**Marine Debris Removal:** The second project that became a reality aboard *Tiġlaġ* came when she made her first marine debris delivery in Unalaska. NOAA began a marine debris removal program under the Marine Debris Research, Prevention, and Reduction Act of 2006 which provided funding to conduct research and education as well as the collection of marine debris. In the state of Alaska there were no ports accepting marine debris until Unalaska became a receiving port this year. On our June visit to Unalaska we made contact with Dan Winters, the Public Works Director in Unalaska, to determine how to facilitate the delivery. We decided that *Tiġlaġ* would make a delivery to Unalaska on our September visit. During the second half of our field season (that was spent primarily in the western Aleutians) the crew made the effort to collect marine debris off of the beaches while not interfering with the ship's mission in the refuge. Collection primarily took place on the islands of Agattu, Attu and Great Sitkin. This removal only required the ship's skiffs, manpower and hours. Areas targeted were streams that were being clogged by lost nets and their remnants. Brailer bags were placed into the skiff, brought to the beach, and filled in the skiff while it sat on the shore. They were then offloaded onto the ship using the aft crane and stored on the back deck. On Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> the brailers were transferred to a public utilities vehicle in Unalaska via the ship's aft crane. There are similar collections being conducted on the Hawaiian Islands Refuge on a larger scale but to my knowledge this is the first of its kind in the Alaska Maritime.

**Lost Villages Project:** The field season's last charter was with the National Parks Service. The vessel assisted the Park Service by transporting some village elders and their families to visit their Lost Village. The villages of Biorka, Kashaga, and Makushin on Unalaska were evacuated during World War II and were never resettled. There are still people alive today who used to call them home. The Park Service wanted to reconnect them with the village, take oral history, and erect crosses at the sites. On September 3<sup>rd</sup> the journey began under dark and cloudy skies. The weather was westerly 20–30 knots when we left in the early morning and the seas were 8-10 feet. As we left Unalaska Bay the high aspirations of the day were quickly receding due to the weather. As we approached Cape Cheerful, a decision had to be made whether to proceed or cancel the trip and re-schedule for a later day. The wind had subsided a bit but the ground swell was still there and was going to make for an uncomfortable ride for the next 4 hours. Even the youngest of the group had lost his color and was sinking lower into his chair. The village elder, Nick Lekanoff (83) was down in the bunk and had been

since we passed Ulakta Head. I went down to see if he was OK and how he felt about continuing on. I asked "Nick do you want to go back to town?"

He replied "Nope!" "Nick do you still want to go to Makushin" "Yup!" OK , so that is what we did. We kept a steady course for Makushin and by 11:30 we rounded Makushin Point a rainbow appeared and the sun came out as we neared the final anchorage in front of the old village site. The swell was gone and the bay itself was as calm as a lake but with a strong wind coming offshore. Once the vessel was anchored I came down to the back deck and there was Nick standing on his two wobbly 83 year old feet and I asked him " Nick are you ready to go ashore?" and he replied "Yup!" So



we launched the skiff and brought all the folks ashore who were connected to the village. The elders from Kashega chose to stay aboard and rest. After we arrived ashore we got to the old Church site that Nick was a caretaker of and once he was sure where we were the younger men of the group dug a hole to erect the cross. After the cross was set into place a few prayers were said and hymns were sung in both languages. Afterwards we lay in the tall autumn grasses and wild flowers with the wind blowing through the pass and listened to Nick recall stories of when he was a child living in Makushin. I could have stayed for a long time but with each gust of the freshening breeze I couldn't help to think it was time to go. "Nick are you ready to head back?" "Nope!" We all laughed. As we left Makushin that day the bright white cross sparkled in the sunshine. The ship never went on to Kashega as it was too rough once we got out of the bay. We headed back to the harbor with Nick aboard with hope that we will finish this trip next year.