

## 2010 M/V Tiġlaġ Field Season Report

### Shipyard:

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February the ship got underway for its prescribed visit to the shipyard. This shipyard contract was won by Federal Marine Services and the work was performed in the Fairhaven Shipyard in Bellingham, Washington. The ship is put in dry dock every four years to be inspected and maintained with particular attention paid to the shafts, propellers, hull, and numerous other vital systems. It is a 7-day journey to Bellingham and the cruise took us through the Inside Passage. We entered Southeast Alaska via Cape Spencer and transited through Petersburg and Ketchikan in the U.S. waters and via Prince Rupert and



Vancouver Canada. The crew was lucky in having a ship's eye view of the fireworks above the Olympic Arena the night the winter Olympics closing ceremony was being held in Vancouver.

We arrived in Bellingham on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March and the work began that day and continued for 7 weeks. The final contract was not in place until the 15<sup>th</sup> of March

which made some items on the shipyard list unavailable during the first two weeks of work. The ship was scheduled to be hauled on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April but was delayed due to extreme high winds that morning. Then in the predawn hours of the 9<sup>th</sup> she came out of the water via the shipyard's rail way system which was the first time the ship had ever been hauled that particular way. In the past she was raised out of the water by way of a dry dock. [The ship drives onto a submerged dry dock that has the blocks pre-set to hold the ship in the right position. Then the water is pumped out of the dock with the ship in it and as the dock rises out of the water she slowly becomes dry and in place inside the dry dock.]

Using a railway is a completely different process: the ship is maneuvered onto the submerged rail way that has blocks pre-set for the ships hull on the rail way carriage. The rail carriage is slowly pulled out of the water via a land based winch. The ship lands on the blocks secured to the rail way carriage. We began this process with the tide being at its highest point of the day and has just begun to fall. Once the ship is secured to it in the proper place on the

carriage then the railway is slowly hauled out of the water by the winch and cable along the existing railroad track. In my humble opinion it was all that the winch and cable could do to pull the old girl out.

After the completion of all hull work the ship was launched at high tide at 5am on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April in the pre dawn light. The vessel weighed over 500 tons while sitting on the rail on land at the time of her launch. The shipyard used the same winch that hauled her out to put her back in with. Pulling 500 tons out of the water is more strenuous than putting it back in. There is a slight incline in the pitch of the rail that the vessel was on while in the yard. The winch actually had to pull the boat forward to break her loose after sitting in one spot for almost 4 weeks. Once she was loose and the brake of the winch was eased off just the slightest bit.....well let's just say if you have never seen a vessel launched this was one to see! Once you get 500 tons rolling downhill it tends to pick up momentum and I am grateful that it was at high water because water can be your friend .And it definitely was that day. At the conclusion of the launch (which just took seconds) you could see smoke bellowing out of the shack from the brake on the winch inside the launch shack. Eddy the dock master was quite relieved to see the vessel floating next to the pier comfortably with no scrapes as he emerged from the winch house which will be forever more called "Eddy's Smoke House."

On Friday April 30<sup>th</sup> the ship set sail for Homer, Alaska, to begin our scheduled 2010 field season which was to begin on the 15th of May. For those of you who are superstitious it is against the lore of the sea to begin a voyage on a Friday. The Captain being fully aware of this legend threw caution to the wind and left the dock by 2000 hr that Friday night only to be anchored up in Bellingham Bay with steering problems by 2230 hr. After some long hours of trouble shooting and consultation with Communication North rep, Pat Mars, we got underway on Saturday morning by 9a.m. and arrived in Homer on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May.

#### Observations:

Port engine mechanical problems delayed the vessel's planned departure from Homer on May 12<sup>th</sup>. We got underway on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May to begin our field season and our first stop was only hours away in the Barren Island group at an island called Sud . There we put out song meters to monitor bird calls during the summer. We proceeded south west to begin putting out our annual monitoring camps. Our first field camp was put out at Chowiet Island and then onto the island of Aiktak. I wanted to transit 12 Fathom Strait to see if this year it was as rich in wildlife as it was last year. The previous year we transited the strait for the first time in the spring of year and it was a highlight of the season because of the thousands of kittiwakes and shearwaters we observed along with numerous fin and humpback whales. This year it was

completely different. The birds and whales were nowhere to be seen in the amounts that were there last year. Not to say it was barren of life but nothing out of the ordinary. The sea, on the other hand, was out of the ordinary. Instead of transiting the protected waters that the Shumagin and Popof groups offer, we were in the open ocean getting pounded from a westerly gale on the nose for the entire transit to Aiktak. The large congregation of Humpbacks and shearwaters was witnessed later in the year in September when the ship was working in the Krenitzin Island group when the vessel was working at Tangik Island. It has been six consecutive years that we have witnessed such a prolific example of whales and birds feeding in very large numbers in and around this group of islands during our fall transit.

The field season observations from the bridge for marine mammals were somewhat similar to the previous year. Dall porpoise were the most common marine mammal observed this year. Jeff Williams, Aleutian Island Biologist, had asked that we pay a little more attention to the porpoise as a result we saw 192 Dall's. Humpbacks were next with 146 sightings. The rest of the numbers are orca's (74), fin whales (46), minke whales (33), sperm whales (20), fur seals seen not in the vicinity of the rookeries, (14) and harbor porpoise (2). The short tailed albatross sightings this year were close to 2009 (9) and this year (8); all sightings were from Sequam Pass west.

## **Tiġlaġ facts for 2010**

- Days at Sea : 136
- Miles Traveled : 15,779 nautical miles
- Passengers : 167
- Ports of Call: (9) Alaska-Adak, Homer ,Kodiak, Sand Point, Seward, St George, St Paul, Unalaska, Dutch Harbor and Bellingham Wa.
- Dockings: 51
- Field Camps Supported: 19
- Countries Supported : Canada and the United States of America
- Federal User Groups: BLM, NMFS, NSF, Papahanaumokukea Marine National Monument, USDA, USGS/BRD, National Parks Service.
- NGO's: Alaska Volcano Observatory, Aleut Corporation, Island Conservation, Memorial University, Scripps Institute, the University of Alaska Anchorage and Fairbanks, University of California ( Davis ,Santa Cruz ,and San Diego).
- Refuge projects supported:
  - Annual Seabird monitoring camps (5)
  - Bsierp ,Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystems Research Project

Fox eradication at Kanaga Island  
Kasatochi eruption studies  
Kittlitz murrelet telemetry project  
Logistical support to Adak, St. George, and St. Paul Islands  
Rabbit eradication at Poa Island  
Rat Island assessment  
Rootok Island fox re-check  
Seabird colony mapping in the Andreanof Islands and the Pribilof Islands  
U.S. fish & wildlife archeological and botanical surveys at Adak and Amlia  
World War II "Valor in the Pacific" project support

### Highlights:

There were many highlights this year as there is every year. A few in particular come to mind when you reconstruct the year.

#### Kasatochi Volcano Studies

In June we revisited the Island of Kasatochi again to witness the progress of its rebirth.

As many of you know there was a catastrophic volcanic eruption in August of 2008. The island was completely covered in ash many feet thick in places. Some species of seabirds returned for breeding season last year and again this year and the sea lions were at their usual rookery site on the north side. While there was no real signs of vegetation recovery in 2009 there was evidence that some small insects returned or survived the eruption. In 2010 though



there are real signs of change even to the naked eye. There was pair of peregrine falcon chicks discovered on one of the hillsides by a survey crew on island and from the looks of the photo one of them didn't like the idea of visitors. Vegetation was also visible on ridge lines where ash had eroded off and the old vegetation was exposed and thriving. Although not yet confirmed there may be an insect new to science found on the island in 2010. It will be announced later in a paper.

## Youth Conservation Corp Ships With Us

In July after re-supply we left Homer with two new crew members who were part of the Youth Conservation Corps project. Emily Schmidt and Colton Willoughby came aboard for the cruise from Homer to St Paul. Upon their arrival at St Paul they were to participate in a trail building exercise with the local islanders. While on board during the transit they were assigned numerous duties which included cleaning the galley, heads, passageways, and pilot house windows. The students played an active role as a lookout on the bridge along with learning navigational skills such as chart plotting, course setting and estimating time of arrivals to waypoints during the transit to the Pribilofs. In the Shumagin group of islands along the Alaskan Peninsula the ship conducted seabird surveys at Near and John islands where the students performed duties as recorders of observations in the skiff. This was the first year that any YCC students were introduced to an extended period of time aboard ship with no contact with family or friends unless there was a need. They were accompanied by a Park Ranger, Ingrid Harrald, who did a remarkable job in keeping the students focused on the tasks at hand and working with the crew to manage their schedules. There were times when the ocean played a factor in their performance, but all in all, the exercise was a success.

## Listening for Whales

The ship was chartered to support a new project in the Aleutians this year. We worked with the University of California San Diego/ Scripps Institution of Oceanography in the deployment and recovery of acoustic buoys in the hopes of recording right whales in the Aleutians. There was one buoy deployed north of Little Sitkin and one south of Buildir in depths of 700 and 1000, meters respectively. The buoys were deployed in June and recovered in August and then reset for a winter of listening. We were assisted in the deployment of the gear by Scripps technician Brent Hurley who took part in both segments. The buoy that was deployed south of Buildir was compromised due to a seal failure. The re-deployment occurred at both sites and we are expecting to recover them in the summer of 2011.

## Trapper Cabin Removal

The fox trapper cabin removal program continued on this year and our target was Amlia Island. There were four cabins built by the Service to support the fox eradication in 2001 and have been unoccupied since the completion of the project. It was a challenge to remove 4 in 3 days but that was all the time allotted in the schedule for it. We accomplished the task during Steve Talbot's botanical survey of Amlia. There are more cabins to remove in the refuge and this will happen as time allows.

## Lost Villages

The “Lost Villages” project continued again this year which is a joint effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The National Park Service and the Aleut Corporation. The purpose of the project is to bring family and friends to abandoned villages on the island of Unalaska. The targeted villages this year were Kashega and Biorka which were abandoned at the start of WW II. We began the project last year when we visited the village of Makushin and based on the response of the participants it was considered a huge success. The ship arrived in Unalaska on the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of September and departed for Kashega at 10 pm in order to arrive before dawn. There are no dwellings still standing there but after a 60 year absence an elder George Gordoff still remembered where the old church had been and directed us to it! After removing some loose moss and rummaging around in the wood pile that was lying on the ground there were wooden sculptured hand rails found that were once part of the churches alter. That is where the elders chose to place the Russian Orthodox cross in the ground to mark the site.

Upon visiting the site for the first time it was easy to understand why it was chosen as a place to live. The nearby stream was teeming with pink salmon and harbor seals were in front of the creek waiting for their opportunity to harvest. The natives had access to both the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea. Waterfowl was abundant and the bay provided great protection from the winter storms. We finished our visit in the early afternoon and on a pleasant sea we proceeded north to Dutch Harbor for a pickup of the crew that was to visit Biorka the following morning

The weather the next day became typical fall weather for the Aleutians and our visit to Biorka came with a full gale and heavy rain. Therefore the visit to the village site was short but sweet. All went ashore and erected the cross at the last standing building. It was a meaningful visit for all participants. The wind and rain did diminish enough to hear their beautiful voices singing Aleut songs and prayers. During the return trip to Unalaska that afternoon there was plenty of talk of a future visit to the island of Attu where there is another lost village site.

## Last Port of Call: Remembering Sam Hamilton

This year had lots of ebbs and flows; there were numerous visitors and many challenges to overcome throughout the field season. The season began with a special visit from the director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Mr. Sam Hamilton. I had the pleasure of dining with Sam the night before a scheduled visit to the Tiġlaġ and the Islands and Ocean Visitor Center, and breakfast before the morning visit. It is not often in ones career that you have an opportunity to interact one –on- one with the director outside of his normal routine without an

entourage for more than just a few minutes. Sam treated me as one of the guys. I never once felt like I should feel uncomfortable because I was with the director. We talked for a few hours about a wide range of issues he was dealing with and he avidly listened to what I deal with on a daily basis as a supervisor operating the largest ship in the US Fish and Wildlife fleet. Sam came up through



the haws pipe and he conveyed awareness of all job levels and of their struggles to get the job done right. He exuded a passion for what he was working on at the time which happened to be meetings on the oceanic harvest quota for tuna. You couldn't help but feel his passion and enthusiasm for the subject. I left him at the airport feeling honored to have met the man. That Sunday morning, as I was having my coffee I read in the paper he had died while on a skiing vacation. The Fish and Wildlife lost a great man suddenly and the Maritime Refuge was his last port of call. He will be missed! Thanks for the visit, Sam!

**From left to right: Bob Schulmeister, Eric Nelson, Billy Pepper, Sam Hamilton, and Vernon Byrd**