

A day in the life...

Name: Colin Speedie

Job title: Basking Shark Field Researcher

Responsibilities

I have many responsibilities, not only for the goals of the project but also to ensure the safety and comfort of the crew and volunteers, and maintain the boat in serviceable condition.

Daily routine

On an average day I have the kettle on and boiling for 8 am. This gets the rest of the boat up and started with breakfast. While they are eating I may go ashore to grab some supplies or get the local news. The weather is very important – especially the wind – and so I check the wind speed and direction and choose where we will survey that day and what course we will take over the duration of the week. The boat moors in Falmouth but, depending on the weather, over the course of a week we can go as far as Fowey to the East or even as far as the Scilly's to the West.

Once breakfast is over we set sail along survey transect lines that I have sailed over the past 6 years. During survey time, everyone is on deck looking out for sharks, cetaceans, birds and other interesting sights. During fine weather this is an enjoyable experience although it's not so much fun when windy and the sea is lumpy. Basking Sharks feed on plankton fronts which develop at mixing points between warmer oceanic water and nutrient rich coastal waters. In poor weather conditions these blooms are broken up and the plankton ends up lower in the water column, quickly followed by the Basking Sharks, thus making spotting of sharks in these conditions even more unlikely.

We will anchor for lunch either in a bay if there are waves or further out if it is calm before continuing the survey throughout the afternoon. When we arrive at our place of anchorage for the evening I make dinner for the workers and we sit around and discuss the day and the rest of the week. If we anchor in a marina we either go ashore to use the shower facilities or have a drink in the pub or we stay aboard and chat the night away before bunking down towards midnight.

How I got here

I grew up by the sea and always lived near it. I remember seeing sharks when I was small and wanted to go to university to study Marine Biology, but due to family commitments I was unable to. I became involved in recording sightings of marine creatures and was invited to skipper a yacht on some sighting projects. This gave me 'on the job' training in managing scientific projects, the importance of planning and a great deal of experience of how to work with other people – a very important skill for my profession! Eventually I struck out on my own, first as a wildlife watching skipper and then with my own project – the Basking Shark project I am still working on.

Best bits

I love working on boats this job enables me to sail and work in wonderful places while looking at amazing creatures. I also enjoy working with such an array of people. I have met so many different people spanning the public, researchers and celebrities with the most overwhelming attribute being their empathy toward the threats facing the marine environment and support for what I am doing.

Worst bits

The level of work! I haven't had a weekend off over the summer for 6 years...

