



## EXPEDITION PROFILE

**February 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, 2021 aboard DISCOVERY Yacht Blue Pearl**

The International SeaKeepers Society assisted Florida International University's Dr. Jeremy Kiszka in conducting field research in the waters off of Key Largo, FL and the Gulf Stream aboard DISCOVERY Yacht Blue Pearl, a 78' Flemming. The expedition sought to learn more about the cetacean population in Florida waters south of Miami and north of the middle Florida Keys; specifically, what species of whales and dolphins are out there, how many, and what is their behavior?

The method used is basically visual identification. Most of the time is spent traveling along a transect or line, and simply watching out for any whale or dolphin activity with maybe only a pair of binoculars to assist. Then, if something is seen, one would then document what species was observed, quantity, and any what kinds of behaviors they may be displaying. Photography with telescopic lenses and aerial drones are used as well. With this, details such as scars or notches in their fins, or any kind of interactions with fishing gear or boat collisions might be detected.

The general region or locations of interest are the waters between Florida, the Bahamas, and Cuba which is essentially where the Gulf Stream flows. Dr. Kiszka is trying to determine how important that warm water current is for marine life, particularly, top predators like cetaceans. This also happens to be an area with a lot of human activity, so understanding the level of interaction or conflict is another main goal. Finally, this is a chance to confirm if certain species that are thought to be in these waters, actually are there.

Dr. Kiszka's hope is to be able to return to do more surveys and eventually have some kind of long-term monitoring of these species to better understand their ecology, and their needs.

We'd like to thank Mr. Don Bermant and his wife Denise. They were captain and crew as well as the owners of DISCOVERY Yacht Blue Pearl. Thanks to their expertise, generosity, and hospitality, this trip was made possible, as well as potential future outings.

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