

Striped lightning...



And so another westerly buster barrels its way up the east coast of South Africa. We were just finishing up on our last sample (sizing and determining the reproductive state of a nice mature female sardine, *Sardinops sagax*) when the west came blasting through. It's always spectacular how they announce themselves, and for sure, you don't want to be sitting on the beach with all your picnic gear out.



Today was another quiet day. It started out promisingly enough, with plenty of scattered clusters of diving gannets spread out on the 50m isobath between Mgazi River and Manteku (basically as far as we could see with the bins). The birds were, however, mostly diving over dolphins in the hope of snagging the odd fish. We did see a few birds surface with fish in their mouths, but these are hardly the glut-fests that we see on baitballs. We noted quite a few mixed pods of bottlenose and common dolphins. This year seems to have been the year of the mixed pod.

Undoubtedly, the highlight of the morning was seeking the joy on the face of Peekee. We met Drew, Peekee and John Costello out on the water this morning. Peekee had told us the day before about his misfortune, and at the time we could see the pain etched on his face. Somebody, at his place of temporary abode, had (strolled in from the street, most likely and) stolen his long-time faithful companion boat rod. We're talking fine quality gear here. He was in pain. We thought we'd try to ease his pain and provide a little joy on the water. Featured in the photo below, are the above-mentioned, and being presented with his new rod and reel, by Vic Peddemors, is our dear friend Peekee. Can you feel the joy? It is here.



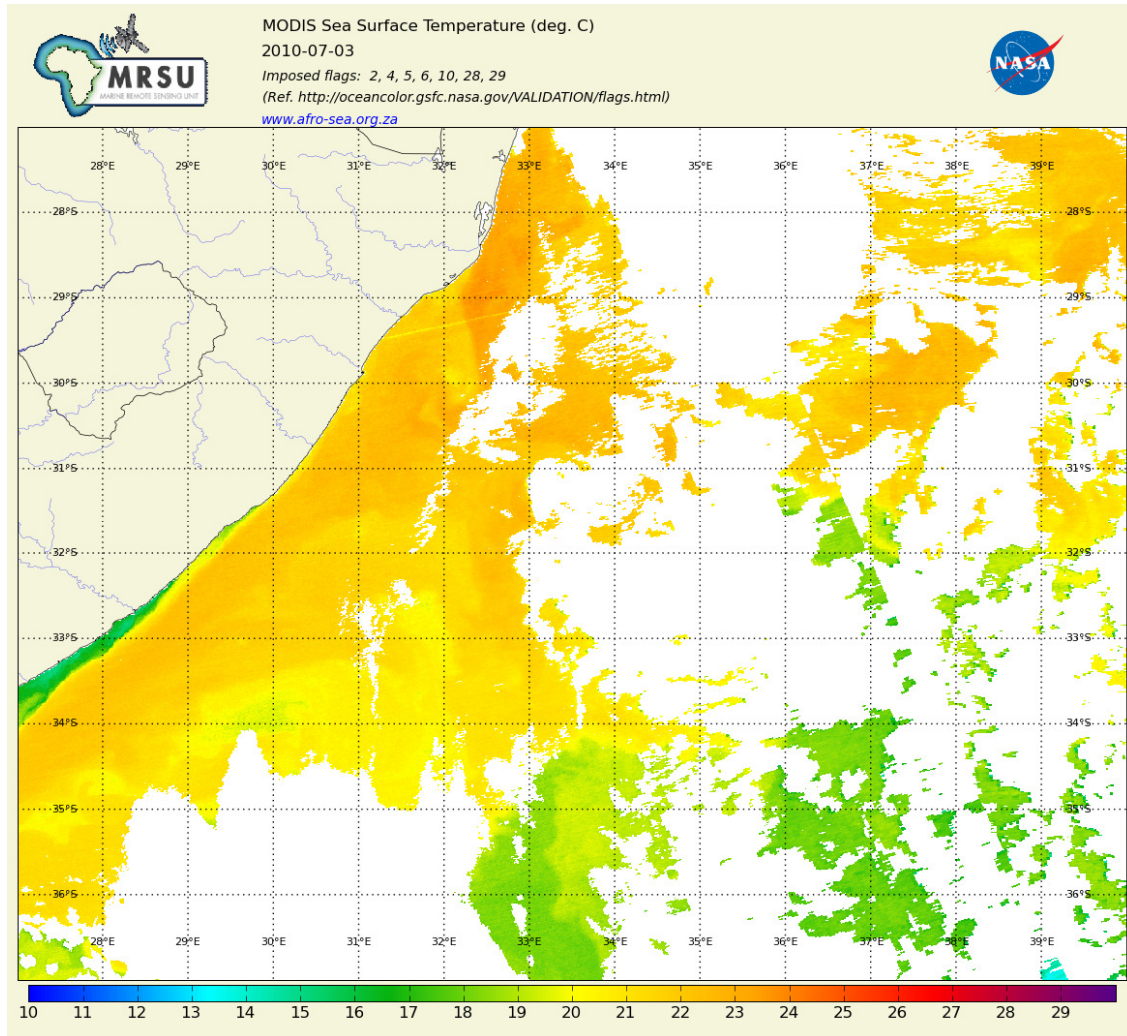
Today, all the activity was spread along a colour line parallel with the coastline roughly along the 40 – 50 m isobaths. This corresponded nicely with a drop in water temperature from 19.7 °C on the outside of the colour line, and 18 °C on the inside. There were plenty of fish on the fish finder, and they were mostly just outside of the colour line. This ties in nicely with the conventional wisdom where fish aggregate at temperature fronts, where there is usually enhanced productivity and, therefore, more food. We did jump in on a few baitballs, but they were mostly very small and with only a few commons working them, and even fewer birds diving.



On our last baitball, however, we were visited by a nice sized sailfish, who treated us to a wonderful display of high end predation. I saw him catch two fish right in front of my eyes. A real beautiful fish, and it even came within a couple of meters of me and displayed his full sail and his iridescent blue stripes. A wonderful sighting and I'm still buzzing. Unfortunately (?) a pair of humpback whales then swam straight through all the activity, giving a massive kick, which completely destroyed the baitball. Last I saw, was one of the humpbacks heading into the gloom on my right, and the sailfish swimming down below me. What an afternoon!!



So, we know that there are plenty of fish around. Today, the majority of fish that we caught sampling were mackerel and west coast red eye. We did, however, get some smell of sardine oil, and also managed to snag a couple of adult sardine, with gonads full of eggs, so they were preparing to spawn. We have all the ingredients now for a good sardine run, but it is just not quite happening. Water temperatures have cooled down nicely in our area (see below), so hopefully some decent activity will surface soon.



Let's see what this westerly buster does tomorrow. Hopefully we'll be able to get out on the water, but until then, we'll be fully focussed on the Dutch game tonight... till next time