

Diary 7 – 10 June 2014

On 24th of May, I arrived at Zackenberg for my 8th field season together with Logistics Leader Henrik Spanggård Munch. Along with Egon, Nicolas, Bruno and Vlad (who were to go to Daneborg) we were actually very near already on the 22nd, but a dense blanket of clouds made any landing impossible. We therefore had to fly back to the airport at Constable Point. The weather had not improved on the 23rd so we got another day at Constable Point. Some people complain that Constable Point is not a nice place, but I tried to make the most of the situation and the kind new Airport Manager lent me a rifle and a staff member some ammunition, so I could go for a short hike on Jameson Land prepared for defence against attacking polar bears. Vlad and Bruno joined me on the hike. We did not see any Polar bears but plenty of Pink-footed and Barnacle geese gathering in the wetlands and riverbed north of the airstrip. The geese pose a potential hazard for the air traffic, but one could have known not to place an airport at Nerlerit Inaat (=place of the geese). The locals at Ittoqqortoormiit would also much prefer to have the airport moved closer. On our hike, we found tracks of the Arctic fox and a big cast (regurgitated indigestible remains of prey items) from Snowy owl. It was great to get out and get some fresh air and a bit of exercise.

When we finally made it to Daneborg, we picked up Bjarne Jensen who was to return and at Zackenberg, Deputy Logistics Leader Jørgen Skafte who was to be relieved by Spanggård. Maria Rask Mylius (GeoBasis), already at Zackenberg, were to stay with us for another 2 weeks. Jørgen and Maria had found quite a few fresh musk ox carcasses very close to the station. It seems that the glazing of ice that formed on the ground last September combined with the relatively thick snow cover had made the winter hard to get through. Despite this, only one of the 14 musk oxen cows provided with GPS collars last October has died (in March). It spent its last time near Daneborg and we secured tissue samples from it by the help of Ph.D. student Stine Højlund Pedersen. Maria is the daughter of a veterinarian who has been working at the musk oxen hunt at Kangerlussuaq for many years and armed with some tips from him and a dissection guide from the Norwegian Wildlife health authorities, we opened up some of the very fresh carcasses and took extra samples of the intestines and organs. I have also had a few camera traps set up on some of the carcasses and got photos of foxes and birds like the Glaucous gull, Ruddy turnstone and Long-tailed skuas. Last Saturday we tested a new Polar bear shooting target. It is designed to more realistically depict an attacking polar bear. It should be said that we never had any attacks or even close encounters by Polar bear in the Zackenberg area, but it is good to be prepared. In addition to rifles, we all carry signal pistols, to scare potential dangerous wildlife away before they get too close.

On June 4th, the 2014 Zackenberg main field season began with the arrival of new people and provisions. Maria left after having spent 7 weeks on the station. In came Dina Laursen (cook), Kristine Skov and Mikkel Tamstorf (GeoBasis), Jannik Hansen (BioBasis), Jakob Abermann, Rasmus Egede and Jonathan Petersen (Asiaq). Shortly after their arrival, and while we were doing a short walk on snowshoes to the new bridge, we saw the first water running in the Zackenberg River bed. The new arrivals had not yet had time to place bets on the date of river flow! We crossed the bridge and walked back on the other side to cross the river before the water had reached the old river crossing site. In the days since arrival, the Asiaq team has worked on setting up a new station with sensors on the bridge. GeoBasis has worked with sorting out loggers and measuring snow, taking water samples and checking the various stations. BioBasis has monitored the snow melting off the phenology plots, observed the first flower buds of Purple Saxifrage and set up arthropod traps and cameras on fox dens. We have also moved some snow for Anders Michelsen. We have spotted a few of the Little Skuas still carrying Geolocators (minor and light logging devices). Hopefully we can start next week in trying retrieving these loggers, by re-catching the birds. The logistics department has kept the station nice and tidy, pumped up some of the new fresh and clean water (Store Sødal seems not to have broken through yet) and made good use of a newly designed airstrip grater (rebuilt boat trailer). Dina has spoiled us all with lovely food and plenty of cakes.

For the last couple of weeks it has been extremely calm but right now, the wind has caught up.

That is all for now,

Out Zackenberg!

Deputy Scientific Leader and BioBasis Field Biologist, Lars Holst Hansen