

Diary 7 – 8 July 2011

A station full of people

The first flight since two weeks brought up fresh food and more people to Zackenberg, which means that we now are 20 people and that the station is pretty full and the research projects are gathering data with full speed.

The weather has mainly been great, even hot (too warm for long johns), with only a little rain. During the night between Saturday and Sunday, some new snow fell and covered the mountains in white for a while, but in general, the snow cover has decreased a lot during the last weeks. Soon we will know who has made best guess of the timing of the break-up of the sea ice on the fjord. The ice break will enable the use of boats and hence inventories on the other side of the river which impossible to cross at the moment.

No polar bears have been seen in Zackenberg this week either, but in Daneborg, about 20 km away polar bears have been encountered. We have instead enjoyed muskoxen among the buildings, funny foxes running around and some hares curiously watching us while walking on their hind legs. A musk ox has been nice enough to die in the river upstream from where the drinking water is taken, but otherwise the muskoxen seem to have had a good winter with few deaths and many calves in the spring. This week the BioBasis people have started their weekly musk ox counts around the whole valley. These huge and heavy grazers probably have a large effect on the system and Julia and Lena spend their days at exclosures looking at their effect on the gas balance on fens.

The first sanderling chicks have hatched, and the foxes have gotten started with predated their nests to be able to feed their young. The situation for the skuas does anyway not seem to be completely as dark as Jeroen feared in the letter of last week. One couple has apparently decided to try to make up for the bad success of the others by incubating a nest containing four eggs instead of the normal one or two. When this observation was reported the bird guys were so surprised that they assumed the insect people finding the nest must have mistaken a long-tailed duck for a skua. Well, both fly and are not insects, so they are indeed pretty similar.

The Arctic summer is in full bloom in the valley and among the stones higher up in the mountains. Butterflies and other insects make all they can out of the short summer. The woolly bears, hairy and cute caterpillars, have decided that the autumn is approaching and some of them have already made themselves ready to rest until next spring. The first butterfly of this kind has emerged from her cocoon in the dry lab after spending seven years as a caterpillar in the wild. She started her short time as a butterfly by immediately successfully attracting wild males of her kind, which means that there hopefully soon, will be tiny woolly bears starting. Even the logistics guys got interested in insects for a little while when they heard that there would be butterfly sex. From many of the other caterpillars being brought up, parasitic wasps and flies have emerged instead of butterflies.

Claus looks harmonic while he stands or sits around in the vicinity of the station watching tufts of flowers to keep track on visiting insects. Some others get the possibility to (or have to, depending on whom you ask) walk long distances to get the data they need. Others carry lots of equipment around to measure things like gas fluxes and greenness of the vegetation.

The flu has continued to attack the males at the station, who have still have tried to work with blurry and tired, but eager looks in their eyes. Another reason for this kind of looks in the eyes of people is the often very short nights. These are caused by long working

days, which often continue far into the sunny nights, great hikes in the beautiful landscape and nice hanging around in the evenings, which sometimes causes sleeplessness also for those trying to sleep. The past week has again been great thanks to the wonderful environment, the great food (and cakes) as well as the nice and sometimes quite crazy people at the station.

Malin Ek