

Diary 9: 11-17 July 2011

No ice left on Young Sund

So here we are, one more week at Zackenberg! Not a single rainy day during the last week and hardly any clouds at all this nice, warm and sunny weather keeps reminding us that the Arctic summer is here. However, for the first time after the summer solstice, the sun lies a bit behind Mt. Zackenberg in its way to the north, making a big shadow over the station for a few minutes in the late evening.

Perhaps the main news of the week though, is that there is no ice left in the Young Sund fjord near Zackenberg, it melted amazingly fast during the last few days and now there is only some ice left between Daneborg and BasaltØen.

What else... well, we celebrated Erik's birthday and we enjoyed it listening to some of his stories and experiences in N, S, NE, SE, SW, NNE, WNNSNE Greenland (and probably somewhere else) which brought us back to the 70's and onwards. All in all, we learned that it is worth falling down a rock and breaking your arm into pieces or getting lost with a raft in the middle of a foggy ocean as long as you discover a new lichen species, (I guess it would work for new vascular plant or animal species as well...). In any case, we were all fascinated by his undoubtedly long and overwhelming scientific experiences in the Arctic. After that, there was a drastic shift in the conversation and out of the blue, we were all submerged into a West African atmosphere; Kim delighted us with a quickly improvised orchestra, made out of a metal basket together with his Louis Armstrong-ish voice. A nice musical cocktail, which made us, sing a typical West African song (the so-called *Umbaba-Umbabayeye* –sorry if spelling it wrongly-).

The Twin Otter visited us on Thursday as usual and Dina, the former cook, left us. She was replaced by Lone, who keeps the nice tradition of making delicious food for everyone. In addition, Kim left and was replaced by Søren in the logistics section.

Before I forget, someone at the station had a new Arctic experience, which is the first case ever reported as far as I am concerned: sneezing and coughing exactly at the same time (and everyone around subsequently bursting into tears of laughter). That was quite an experience, and given that this rare action might become more and more common with climate warming, we decided to baptise it with a verb so that people can refer to it whenever it occurs from now on among the Zackenberg population: "to cachoo" in case you are in a rather informal atmosphere or "to kneeze" if you are in a rather posh scenario. To make things easier they are both regular verbs and are conjugated in the traditional way. So everyone should feel free to cachoo/kneeze from now on. We might provide the Hungarian, Finnish, Russian, Catalan, Dutch or Danish translations if requested in advance.

Let us better move on more naturalistic issues now... We are all surprised of how far birds are able to migrate, which is indeed an awesome distance in many cases; but did anyone actually measure how many kilometres the Sanderling project people do walk every day? Quite a big distance as well, equally amazing I must say! However, these long walking days is yielding some nice fruits, as the people involved in this project have been able to detect up to 30 sanderling nests during this season! Good job! At the moment the sanderlings are taking care of their

chicks, warning them in case they do not behave properly, which must not be an easy job.

Also the other people are working hard and walk around for many hours and apparently everyone looks happy with their tasks; some people are picking up caterpillars or other strange creatures; some others are busy collecting data for the BioBasis or GeoBasis projects; some other count hidden plant seedlings in the heath...

Back to birdlife, while long-tailed skuas are trying to catch wader chicks, our walking ornithologists in turn managed to catch a skua (quite an experience for such bird, which is mainly walking on the "catching side" of life, rather than on the "caught side"). Thanks to that, this individual now brings a data logger, which will hopefully and eventually provide some information about their mysterious migrations. By the way, a dead skua with a broken wing was also caught and accurately dissected afterwards in the lab. According to its intestine content, we could see that despite being a bird of prey, it also eats some salad from time to time, by adding some petals to its diet. We do not know about their favourite dessert yet.

After hearing all these stories one keeps on thinking that plant ecology is certainly less amusing than animal ecology (not difficult to come up with this idea when counting *Dryas* and *Salix* leaves in the lab every night...). Hmm... I might bear it in mind it when writing up the next research application!

In any case, no reason to complain at all, as staying at Zackenberg is an absolute pleasure for anyone involved in any fields of study concerning nature. I will never get tired to say "thank you" to all the people who made it possible for us to stay here and to be able to share this wonderful experience with the nice people staying at the research station. So, once more, thank you!

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