

Diary 11 – 7 July 2014

This is my first visit to Northeast Greenland, and I must admit that it was not a difficult decision to make, when I was asked if I would like to come to Zackenberg for four weeks to help Jannik with the bird monitoring. Zackenberg is amazing and I can understand why people keep coming back.

My primary task was to catch long-tailed skuas (long-tailed jaeger in North American). This amazing "tiny" little bird breeds mostly on the Arctic tundra and the farthest north of any of the three species of jaegers, and probably as far north as any bird. It is hard to believe, but a long-tailed skua spends about 75% of its life at sea. As one can imagine, it is quite difficult to track seabirds over vast areas of open water. Thus acquiring knowledge about their whereabouts during the non-breeding season is challenging. However, as described in the week letter two weeks ago, tiny light level loggers (Geolocators) can do just that.....the only problem with these types of loggers is that you have to re-catch the birds in order to get the data. One might think that catching 10 birds should not be that difficult....but it is. Especially when the birds "decide" to skip a breeding season (long-lived seabirds are known to do this when food conditions are poor). This means spending many hours "hunting" down skuas trying to lure them into a trap instead of "just" catching them on the nest. I can sadly report, that so far we have only managed to catch one single skua. I do not think Peter Bondo (week letter two weeks ago) realises how lucky he was to be part of this great event.

Not all is bad on the bird front though. Despite the poor breeding season we still find dunlin, sanderling, ruddy turnstone and common ringed plover nests. And it is a great joy to catch the birds, ring them and hopefully see them return to the area again next year.

I will copy Tomas and end this letter on a more anthropocentric note.

Last Tuesday we had to say goodbye to Tomas. We practically had to cram him into the backseat of the twin otter. The plane was full to the brim with cargo, which had to be transported to Daneborg, leaving very little space for the long legged Finn.

Luckily for us, with Tomas' departure came ten new people.

From Lund University came Lena and Laura. You can easily recognise them by the amount of equipment they carry into the field on their backs as well as in wheel barrels. This however is all paying off and they always return from the field with smiles on their faces.

From Germany came Nils and Toby. I am not 100% sure what exactly they do, but you will hear more from them in the week to come. One thing I know for sure is that they definitely brighten our day with their yellow wellingtons and Nils' bright orange windproof trousers.

The sanderling team was joined by Michelle. Luckily she brought good shoes and high spirit. Jeroen, Tom and Moray are still marching their feet off. Finding nests this year is quite difficult and extremely time consuming and between them they walk several marathons per day! They are however being closely followed by Jannik doing his yearly bird census, and Lars the musk ox counts.

The freshwater team consists of Catherine and Sandy from Birmingham University and Simon and Tenna from Aarhus University. Again, I'm not 100% sure exactly what they are measuring in the streams or which samples they are taking...but I do know they will return home with very strong backs from carrying all the water samples from the field to the field station.

Kristine and Laura still return from the field happy and cheerful, and now joined by Mikhail, who is the main guy behind the methane chambers. Maybe Kirstine and Laura are happy they can leave the chambers to him? Mikhail is known for being able to solve everything!

After Tomas' excellent description of the weather in the last week letter I will not comment much on this except for letting people know that the mosquitoes have arrived! Also, the wind picked up last week. Quite nice for the people who are not fond of mosquitoes.....not so nice if you work with insects. Mikko probably had the hardest time during these days and was pretty convinced that all the insects had followed Tomas and blown to Helsinki.

Last but not least we have our logistic team Kenny and Jørn still working around the clock to maintain the field station but never too busy to give a helping hand if others are in need. And our amazing cook Dina. How I will survive without her wonderful food and cake, not to mention her cheeky remarks, only time will tell.

We celebrated Michelle's birthday on Saturday evening with this season's birthday song (see last week letter). Singing and cake eating was followed by a dog whip competition which Kenny won, after a close final with Lars.

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