

## Diary 14 – 27 August 2011

The past week has been an escape from the routine of the University. One can even call it a vacation :). Don't get me wrong; it has been full of long days and hard work. But there are also moments spent staring at nature which is characteristic of a vacation. Not sure exactly how to communicate this duality between hard work and rest that I feel here at Zackenberg but I'll try my best :).

One thing that stood out from the first day at Greenland was my encounter with the infamous *Salix arctica*. I had been working with this flower for 2 years and had never really seen it in person. Before arriving to Zackenberg we made a pit-stop to pick up some soldiers that were fixing up a hut. And there was where I saw it. It was bigger than I had expected but the texture was a bit rougher than I had imagined. The female is unlike any flower I know. To me, the horn-like capsules and their colour give it a sort of dignity and uniqueness. Nobody seemed too excited about it; they were more worried about how to get 100 kilograms of stuff into the plane. I did not waste any time and got on my knees and took as many pictures as possible while drawing some curious stares from the pilots and soldiers. The *Salix arctica* is an important part of my PhD project but somehow, when I arrived to Greenland, I stopped thinking of it in that way only.

After having survived a semi-confusing first couple of days, I started off my third day with a trip to my newly constructed *Salix arctica* plots. It consists in setting up some special markers at each corner of the plot and taking a bunch of pictures. When I arrived, I set everything down on a nearby rock and as I began, I had a curious visitor. At the beginning I was not aware of its presence. But when I saw something move off the corner of my eye, I knew I was not alone. It was a fox that was trotting down a little hill about 50 meters from where I stood totally unconcerned with my person. It seemed like he was on his daily territory marking duties because he peed everywhere. He was even so kind as to claim the rifle I was carrying with a good dose of urine. When I saw him, I tried to fetch my camera. But when I finally had it in my hands, the fox had trotted away.

I'm not sure what my plot's effects are on the animals but some days after the fox encounter, I had another surprise when I went out into the field. That day I had borrowed some binoculars from bird watching station in the living room. Before getting to the place where my plots were, I noticed a couple of rocks that were not previously there. I quickly took out the binoculars and looked to see what the strange rocks were. To my surprise, there were two Musk Oxen basking in the morning sun. Since I wanted to take a picture of them, I slowly went closer and took a picture on every step that I took. When I was about 200 meters from them they started staring at me and looked a bit nervous. I slowly took a couple of steps more and they both stood up at the same time and kept staring at me. I stood still for a while thinking, they would feel comfortable with my presence. After about a minute of staring at each other I took a step forward and looked down to take my camera. When I returned my gaze, I noticed that they were running for the hills and in a matter of seconds were hundreds of meters from where I was. I was left with a couple of semi-decent pictures and a sense of relief that they ran away instead of towards me :).

It's strange to write about these three experiences because they seem to fit more in a vacation weekly letter than in a work travel one.

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