

Diary 16 - 26 October 2011

White Christmas...

Mikkel Tamstorf, manager of GeoBasis, arrived just in time to celebrate "Christmas Eve" (two months early) – something introduced in 2009 by Kirsten Christoffersen and others. This time we were not really prepared with special food provisions but made good with what was available – chicken a la duck stuffed with apples and prunes and basmati ris-a-la-mande (with extra cream taken in by Mikkel). We really had a white Christmas with the ground now covered with a relatively thick and even layer of snow and we have been using skis and snowshoes to get around. Recently one of the snowmobiles has also been in use to lay out a new cable and bring back some retired boardwalks and spare building materials from the two new constructions raised by GeoBasis in the fen.

Since the last newsletter, the ice has formed on Young Sund. Unfortunately, we did not go skating before the last snow made it a bit challenging but the recent wind may have swept it somewhat. Some of us did however, squeeze in a few skating trips on Lomsø. We have had a few periods with rather strong wind. So strong that the methane auto chambers were put on standby to spare the lid motors. Recently, Kirstine has been struggling to dig out the chambers from drifting snow. The snow has probably driven out some of the many musk oxen that had otherwise gathered in the valley. Some three weeks ago a record high number of 412 individuals were counted, aged and sexed in the musk ox survey area south-east of Aucella-elv. They gathered in the lowlands then but have now spread out a bit more and climbed the less snow-covered slopes. One of the 412 was found dead on Trekanten a few days after being surveyed. This was to the advantage of at least four different arctic foxes, numerous ravens and a nature photographer who set up unmanned cameras with motion detectors. The results have been scrutinized on the big new flat screen in house 9. Literally hundreds of photos have been screened unedited on demand from some of the spectators. Besides ravens, we have been frequented by a few gyrfalcons. They have checked out the radio mast as vantage point scouting for weak individuals in the flocks of immature snow buntings. These buntings collected in huge flocks in September before going south. A few of them have been observed still hanging around recently looking for food in the snow free patches. In addition, we have had up to 11 arctic hares around the camp browsing for food. Some of them were seen in the dried up western pond of Gadekæret and one particular individual was very little bothered with the comings and goings of Jørgen Skafte in and out of house 5. It just kept nipping on the extra green grass in front of the house. Jørgen also made friends with an unusually curious musk ox checking him out as he burnt our burnable. He has otherwise been installing new securing hatches for the window blind besides keeping the whole station up and running – not to mention baking all our rye bread and making us fresh yogurt.

To round up some of the open ends from the last newsletter, we did get some of the awaited spare parts with the Teleflyveren in late September. We then made a boat trip to Daneborg just before ice on the sound made it impossible, and enjoyed the hospitality of our neighbours from the sledge patrol. Kirstine and I were lucky to join a sledge team on a short training sledge ride. In addition, the official freeze up of the river in 2011 was 28 September, making Kirstine the winner of the bet. She also won the when-does-the-sun-go-behind-the-mountains-on-Clavering-Island-bet on a particular day after a long spell of overcast weather. Then she is the geography person, and apparently much in tune with nature here. The cloudy nights have made our northern lights observations difficult by the way, but we still keep our hopes high in this, our last, week.

That'll be all for now! Merry Christmas!

Lars Holst Hansen, BioBasis
Out, Zackenberg!