

## Diary 17 – 15 August 2012

### Goose noise, missed parties and a friendly bomb

Our connection to the rest of the world, the weekly Twin Otter flight, arrived on Wednesday, a day earlier than expected. Bringing us fresh fruits, vegetables, mail and Christian, an Austrian PhD student, it had a short stop for unloading its cargo, just to take off again and fetch the French-Dutch working team from Hochstetter Foreland for an overnight stop at Zackenberg. It was wonderful to meet Olivier, Jeroen and others, who looked and smelled surprisingly civilized, considering the long weeks they had spent in the tundra without the comfort of a research station.

On Thursday, Katrine, Laura, Tora and I had a lift on the boat to the Zackenberg trappers' hut, just a few kilometres west on the shore of our home fjord but on the other side of the violently flowing Zackenberg River. Tora and I wanted to take samples of the dwarf willow, one of the two species of willows in the area that chose to dwell virtually only on the other side of the river. Katrine had the important task to clean the wildlife camera set up in front of a fox den – apparently one of the arctic foxes had licked the lens so all shots resembled some undoubtedly famous contemporary paintings. Laura had to find some geocatches of the GeoBasis, that is, data loggers well hidden under rocks in a rocky terrain... We just had a nice evening walk near the river bank when we suddenly spotted three guys from the Sirius patrol approaching the station, now on the *other* side of the river. They brought lots of soda with them, but apparently our Zackenberg staff could not stand the concentrated H<sub>2</sub>O the cans contained, so they were urgently diluted by some 40% ethanol, also known as gin and vodka. According to eye-witness testimonies, that somehow initiated a party, and our sledge-patrol neighbours turned less SIRIUS, and nearly HILARIUS.

On Friday, Laura and I returned to the station but Katrine and Tora continued their trip to Daneborg (where, as it turned out later, they participated in some sort of party as a compensation for the missed one), and walked back safely to Zackenberg on Sunday. But we weren't the only ones who went to the other side. Jannik and Martin had an overnight fishing expedition to the hut on Saturday and brought a couple of arctic chars back – which we all had the chance to taste and find to be delicious on Wednesday dinner (in chef Lone's capable hands we did not expect anything else – definitely not charred char and no fishy fish).

Otherwise it was another week in the office. Thanks God, we all have an open-air office. And we humans are not the only party animals in the tundra. The careful observer may see flocks of turnstones, ringed plovers and geese flying over, getting more and more social and ready for the long trip to the south. Flocks get larger and goose noise (a term coined by Jannik) louder; it is party time before autumn arrives. And the signs of autumn are already there. Low-lying fens start to get their autumnal colours, the yellows and oranges of sedges, and frost-bitten patches of mountain avens are turning red. One morning, our insect traps, containing soap water, were covered with a thick layer of ice! Berries of the Arctic blue-berry are ripe and juicy. We are experiencing the last warm days before the summer is over. Talking about geese, we celebrated the end of the restriction of entering the moulting area of pink-footed geese with – how else – eating (some German) geese.

And if you think this is enough partying for a week, you are sooo fundamentally wrong! Zackenberg Ecological Research Operations, alias ZERO, turned 15 on Tuesday. Apart from Per and Gernot, who went up to Freya Glacier on Clavering Island, we all celebrated it with several cakes and several times. Kirstine prepared two kinds of birthday cakes, one called coffee-dream cake with ginger figs (I thought it was 'ginger fix'...) and whipped cream, the other's name is just too difficult to remember, filled and covered with various berries and fruits anyway. And there were tiny Danish flags all over and a silly but cute Danish birthday song

was broadcasted on channel 16 to the *entire* Young Sund area. It was quite a long lunch break, indeed, and when the REAL celebration began at dinner time (with formal dressing code, of course), I was collecting plant samples high up on Aucellabjerg. Another party missed, I suppose. But in any case and once again, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ZERO! For being a teenager, you have been behaving extraordinarily well!

This remarkable week ended with an explosion. A tiny one. The ship, bringing supplies for both Sirius and ZERO once a year, arrived to Daneborg this morning. To celebrate this event, Sirius patrol made a bomb of old fuel barrels etc. and fired it at quarter to ten in the morning, apparently meant to express a warm welcome (I wonder if it is part of traditional Danish hospitality). We heard the explosion 20 kilometres away just and just over the everyday mosquito music in our ears, so nobody got scared. Not even Katrine, who had thought I was a polar bear just a couple of weeks ago (see Zackenberg week letter 1.8.2012).

To take together, this was a busy week with loads of fun (and, for the record, we were all working hard when not having a party). It went really fast – *det går lynsnappy!*

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