

Diary 5 – 4 June 2010

Fuelling up in Zackenberg

It is Sunday now and for a change the sun is shining. The sunny weather was a surprise and a relief, especially for the logisticians, who have been planning to walk to the Kuhn Pass on a Sunday since they arrived here in early June. So far the weather has been really nice, except for their only day off during the week, however. Yesterday evening some clouds came rolling in from the fjord. It was a beautiful sight, but made us all expect fog on Sunday. The fog coming from the fjord may indicate that there finally is some open water at the ocean. It seems very unlikely though that it will be possible to sail to the ocean from Zackenberg some time during the next week, as some of us seem to believe.

Last week started with the discovery of several new species for the season or even for Zackenberg. Gergely found some three - spined sticklebacks which are now swimming in ethanol in the BioBasis lab. Nice ornithological observations are a singing male Lapland longspur, a greyleg goose flying north in the usual migratory flocks of pink-footed geese and an abnormally large clutch of five eggs of a turnstone. Gergely also found some very rare species closer to the station. In the kitchen he found a Dina Mite and a Mosegris. With the discovery of the latter he earned a beer which he will certainly enjoy after a long flight home. A new species for science is the extinct Glaciosaurus, of which some believe you can find its ancient tracks at Kuhn Pass. I haven't heard the visitors of Kuhn Pass about it today, so I presume that its presence is still unconfirmed.

Where moult was the latest trend in Zackenberg during the previous week (see Gergely's weekly letter), fuelling seemed the thing to do the last day. Henrik and Jón have been filling the water and fuel tanks. And although the Dina-mite sounds like an explosive creature, it is not this creature but the researchers who might explode if they are not very disciplined. Not all of us are disciplined enough to leave Dina's food untouched. One day Jan brought three different kinds of cakes as his lunch into the field. Yet, he still needed to ask Henrik to make an extra hole in his belt to keep up his field trousers. Despite the good food, the sanderling team still seems to be loosing weight due to the long daily walks of about 20 km. We are actually not fuelling up at all! Some birds however are following the latest trend and are preparing for a southward journey already after the foxes have eaten even their second clutch of the season. One of these is Edward, a sanderling and Gergely's new friend who had its nest together with sanderling Eden close to his pitfall traps. Unfortunately, the foxes found their nest too and both will be in mainland Europe any time soon now.

Also Julie has new sanderling friends that built their nests right in one of her plots where the active layer is being monitored, less than 6 metres from the path. It seems a good location so far, as the nest is still not discovered by a fox and we can see the female called Henrika (ringed in summer 2008) incubating her eggs each day when we go out onto the tundra and when we return in the evening. The male is less often present on the nest. He was caught this year and is called Vladimir after Olivier and Brigitte's son. Although the French team of Ecopolaris got stuck in Zackenberg on their way north to Hochstetter they are using their time well. The French team has found at least three nests of sanderlings and a few additional dunlins.

The snow is now mostly gone and the only difficult area for walking is -strange enough- the only path in the area. There are some deep puddles that we have to wade through daily. The logisticians have now made new boardwalks so that we do not get tempted to walk around the puddles and widen the path (which the Depute does not like). Besides these improvements, we do not hear very much of the logisticians when we return home in the evening. That is a clear sign that everything is running smoothly in the station. An exception is the occasional bangs in the evening. Luckily we are always well informed beforehand that we should not worry those. In those instances the logisticians are just testing some new weapons or anti-bear devices.

Even in a remote place such as Zackenberg we are always up to date with the results of the world cup football thanks to Jannik's uncle. The good performance of the Dutch team so far, made Jan and I decide to name all male sanderlings that we would catch and ring after a Dutch football player who scored. There are now sanderlings named Wesley and Robin. Besides the long days in the field, our own sport activities have not started really. On Saturday we were supposed to play Arctic volleyball for the first time this season, but a late return of the ever hard-working BioBasis team that was counting muskoxen resulted in too small teams so that we had to postpone the match until later notice.

Gergely has completed his mission and found 400 larvae and is devoted to find even more on his last day in Zackenberg before he is flying south. Claus' work also seems to be going well. As a real stalked-eye fly himself he is able to stare at two different flowers at the same time for 40 minutes and study their visitors. The weather during the past week has been great for his work on pollinating insects. Luckily, the mosquitoes have not been extremely annoying yet this summer. The usual fresh breeze from the fjord keeps the majority of them close to the ground to feed nectar instead of sucking our blood. Maybe they are waiting for some fresh blood that will arrive with the next Twin Otter on Tuesday.

Jeroen and Jan

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