

Diary 5: 19 June 2011

Those isbjørne again..

..they've been seen all the time. Or so I was told when our twin otter dodged two mist fronts to land last Thursday. But of course, there was no sign of them the whole next day, and I was starting to suspect our rifle practice was just for fun - until the young male strolled gracefully past at 2 AM. It's definitely worth staying up late collecting nocturnal caterpillars!

Musk oxen are now everywhere. Butting heads together, sleeping on the little remaining snow (why do they do that?), but mostly just placidly nibbling at the vegetation. There are some white/brown foxes too but they don't eat the greenery. One of them did try to eat some of our rubbish, jumping on top of the barrel in which it was kept - which, considering the rubbish was being burnt at the time, was a masterpiece of both firewalking and stupidity.

On the human front, people are at the time of writing: 1) talking about tractors 2) eating cake 3) making caterpillars out of playdough + cutting bits of their own hair off (as decoration for the caterpillars). This is how biologists relax on Saturday evenings. After a long week of field work the topics of discussion become somewhat curious - "People who carry geese, you can't trust them" - so I find it easy to comply with Dina's repeated instructions to put the notebook down. Also because she threatens to withhold her delicious cakes (a powerful threat!) if I quote anything embarrassing.

Thursday's great excitement was the arrival of several new summer migrants (human). Even if they did come hours late because - as the puzzled station received the message - "Malin went shopping". Exactly how the airline managed to leave Malin's luggage behind on a direct flight, forcing her to choose between a hasty shopping spree in Akureyri or surviving weeks of Greenland +4°C weather in one t-shirt, remains unclear.

On the nature front: The mosquitoes have just appeared! Another couple of days and they should be out in force, which is a pleasing sign of summer I suppose. Sanderlings and skuas are nesting, and the snow buntings are just starting. And much of the valley is showing that distinctive 'flowerbed look' now that dryas, poppies etc have decided it's summer.

The station is getting crowded, with a population of Henrik, Kim, Dina, Maria, Jannik, Julie, Tapani, Claus, Jeroen, Malin, Line, Tomas and Lars on the human side (13 individuals, 100% sample) plus nearly 100 caterpillars we're desperately trying to feed. Claude, our star woolly bear caterpillar, almost seems to eat his (her?) own weight in willow leaves every 10 minutes or so.

Volleyball net still not up, maybe next week we'll go from talk to action..

Tapani Hopkins