

## Diary 9 – 13 June 2012

### Zackenberg

The normal field season of Zackenberg Ecological Research Operations is now almost two weeks old. The small team has been rather busy with the usual tasks and a few extra but an update is highly due before the next people arrive tomorrow.

With us to Iceland we had a dentist, Flemming, from the Danish defence forces. He was to fix a broken tooth on one of the Sirius Patrol men in Daneborg. Dina, Jannik and I showed him the hot pool in Akureyri before Maria and Henrik joined us for dinner.

The next day we took off with a short ground stop at Mestersvig. The weather was very nice and a few whales were observed from the plane. We dropped off Flemming at Daneborg, said briefly hello to Jesper and Michael and took off for the last short bit, seeing several seals on the Young Sund ice from above.

On the airstrip at Zackenberg we were met by smiling, sun tanned and weathered Stine, Casper and Jørgen. They were all going home after staying since 9 April. There was no hurry however, as Flemming had to spend time working on the tooth.

After settling in, the field work began. Pretty much everything was still covered in snow but it was getting very soft. So much that I decided to swap day for night and work at night where the snow was a bit less soft. I did this on the night of the return of the Sirius Patrols after 4 months spring trip. The route was planned so I would meet the Sirius teams in Morænebakkerne ("Moraine Hills") on the other side of the still frozen and snow covered Zackenberg River. I guessed that they would follow one of the snow scooter tracks left by the early spring campaign in April and my guess was right. First team was Andreas and Trine and they were followed by a big white dog on the loose. Oh wait; that's no dog! It's a wolf! Andreas and Trine stopped and we chatted briefly. They told me that Morten and Mads had been followed by this wolf bitch in heat for two months! It was even mated by some of the dogs and for the first month it was hard for the men to sleep because of all the commotion. One time they wanted to stop a fight between the wolf and their own bitch. They took the stopping rope to hit at the wolf but it snapped it out of their hands! After the next team had passed, I climbed the hill to look for the wolf and got a few pictures from a distance. As the second last team came, the dogs got entangled a bit as they wanted to get to me. Therefore, I decided to photograph the last team from a distance from Østerport and just wave them a welcome back. After this I went home and woke up Jannik and Maria to tell them about the wolf. Jannik joined me to a hill on the western side of the river not too far from but not in view of the Zackenberg Trapping Station. A relatively fresh musk ox carcass here could possibly attract the wolf and we could overlook most of the valley including the Zackenberg slopes. We did not see it again however and I do not know whether it followed the Sirius teams to Daneborg. Also, we have not seen any signs of polar bears this year but the open water is also much further out compared to last year. But we have made a brand new polar bear shooting practice target, as the old one was getting too trashed!

We are continuing to see indication of a year with many northern collared lemmings. This would be a change after many years with very low numbers. Besides, observing several live individuals (incl. one between house 4 and 8) we have found a dead juvenile and the arctic foxes seem to have many active breeding dens. Also, Jannik have found several long-tailed skua nests. Yesterday we made our first recapture of one of the birds provided with a light measuring geolocator last year. We swapped the locator after a nerve wrecking wait for the bird to go down on the nest again. It did so only 6 minutes before Jannik's deadline. To get to the nest we had to wade across Kærelven which is now running furiously.

Pretty much all streams and brooks are now running and Zackenberg River has run since 7 June with a surge on the 10 June. Yesterday it became extremely wet in Tørvekærene and Rylekærene. It is literally now a waist high snow soup out there and the little hut at MM2 was flooded a bit. Luckily, it seems that all equipment and data is safe. It is only since a few days puddles have started to form on the ice on Young Sund, but some of them seem to become massive. The warm, calm and sunny weather has only been shortly interrupted by cooler more "normal" weather a few foggy days but since we have hardly had any wind it has felt extremely warm, leaving the woollen long Johns unused. We are now all eagerly awaiting the coming week's challenges and the arrival of old and new friends.

That's all for now!  
Out Zac!

Lars Holst Hansen