

Tropical sunshine ... ugebrev nr. 5, 5. juli 1999

I never thought I would say this in Zackenberg or anywhere else in the Arctic, but it is hot here! We certainly can't complain about the weather during the past five weeks. Only a few days of persistent fog, a few drops of rain and a little bit of wind. For the rest tropical sunshine! And we need it because many people are waiting for the snow to melt from their study sites, so luckily the melting is going very fast now.

However, this season is almost two weeks late in comparison with the previous one, and the 1998 season was an abnormal wet one in August, and ... But what is a normal season in Zackenberg, considering the fact that the station has only collected data during the whole year for four years now? Finally, after fourteen days of solitude we had a plane. Six new scientists arrived and one left, so we're 13 now. Besides a load of fresh scientists it also brought the mail. Newspapers reporting 14 days old news of the World, letters from friends telling stories from back home ... They all become the victims of our desire for news!

The plane however did not yet bring what the logistics hoped for: the new generator. More than a month it has been waiting in Iceland, until it finally arrived here on Thursday. Thanks to a splendid plan of the logistic team, the generator, which weights over 600 kilograms, was easily lifted out of the plane and rolled into the generator house. If it wasn't for a broken part it would be running smoothly by now...

Today, Sunday the fourth of July, it is finally possible to get to the other side of the river again! With combined force of the entire station, the steel wire and the rope were reconnected and tightened, but crossing remains hazardous. The water level continued to rise until last Thursday, and then dropped a little. But after a heat wave during the last two days, it is as high as ever and more than 40 meters wide. In the meantime the wildest river crossing plans have crossed our minds: from helicopters over catapults to even, o surprise, a bridge! Fresh wolf tracks were seen again on the west side of the river. Maybe that's why the muskoxen want to cross so desperately...

New people means of course new projects. The Congas team continues the work of previous years, measuring uptake and release of carbon dioxide and methane in different vegetation types. This study is searching for an answer on whether high latitude terrestrial ecosystems act as a source or sink for these greenhouse gasses. Zackenberg also got its own little lemming farm now. The young of a caught lemming will be used to study their food preferences and the effect of that on the vegetation. At the same time movements and home range of collared lemmings in the area are being monitored by radiotelemetry. The Belgian team started with the infra-red heating of vegetation plots, simulating global warming. They study the effects of the heating on growth and metabolism of higher plants and on testate amoebae and diatom communities. The temperature of the heated plots is 2.5°C higher than the temperature of the control plots and is measured and adjusted ten times per second. By the way, bets will soon be made on the date when the fjord ice breaks up. That is if the whisky supply lasts and if the mosquitoes haven't eaten us by then...

/Koen Trappeniers