

Ugebrev 6 - den 14. juli 2009

Another interesting week in Zackenberg

Strange, in the beginning of the Arctic summer here in Zackenberg we had rather bad weather with a lot of fog and low air temperatures, and now we have been enjoying sunshine since the first of July (which actually started with rain in the night). That was good news for the woolly bears that lives for seven years as a caterpillar. We really felt pity for them to have to experience fog and wind for the very short time they live as a moth. In fact, many butterflies are now fluttering by on the tundra and in our insect cups we find record numbers (certainly compared to 2007 and 2008) of arthropods. Possibly the early snow melt resulted in an early insect peak, but when we checked the traps yesterday they were still very full. While we enjoy the butterflies, we do not enjoy the mosquitoes. Luckily, the breezes or hard winds keeps them away from us most of the time. We hoped that this amount of "sanderling food" will result in a good season for this nice bird species that Lenze, Toon, Kirsten, Gunnar, Sharon and I study here. Indeed we managed to find a record number of no less than 44 nests! Of course, this has brought us in a very good mood. Insects and spiders are good food for birds and bird eggs are for foxes. The sanderling team is getting, and BioBasis bird-specialist Jannik already was, used to the fact that a lot of the eggs are eaten by predators before they hatch. Fortunately, some foxes are stupid, they are only interested in the tiny dataloggers next to the nest, but leave the eggs. Nevertheless, we have already ringed about 90 sanderlings (among which are 30 newly born chicks) and more are to follow during the next two weeks.

The early snow melt may be the reason why there are hardly any lemmings (but we do not know for sure yet...Lars and Jannik are still extremely busy with the exciting lemming winter nests counts). Without lemmings no nesting skuas, everyone knows. The egg in the only (!) long-tailed Skua nest that was found this year hatched and the young one was ringed by Jannik in company of Gunnar from Iceland.

The sunny weather is also the reason that ice on the fjord/Sund now finally is breaking up - later than anyone had expected. No one – not even our oracle Sharon who predicted 11 July - won the bet about the date the fjord would open. Despite all of us being losers, we are in a good mood - the sun, the company and 96% pure Icelandic water helps. It makes us sing and having interesting conversations (in all sorts of languages, often a mix of Danish, Icelandic, Dutch, Swedish and some growling) on Saturday evenings to support Julie while she has to stay up all night to take water samples from the Zackenbergelven. Sarah had a good start with her experiments last week and even had some time to support the sanderling team on a long walk and learned how to cross rivers (even though some of us did not give the best example...). Dina is cheerful as always, especially in the mornings during breakfast, and she keeps up her reputation as Zackenberg's number one cake-baker. The other logisticians, Kenny and Jakob, are doing a great job too. Jakob now holds the world record "dry kayaking" and Kenny gives excellent river crossing courses (without kayaks, and without any panic!). Kenny also supported Kirsten with a conference call of an hour from the Netherlands during which she was interviewed for a PhD position and did well. We keep our fingers crossed she will get the PhD grant.

In summary, we can state that we had another great week at this fantastic place. It is a shame that some of us will leave tomorrow, but the people staying look forward to the new inhabitants of the Zackenberg village. We will keep you posted...

Jeroen Reneerkens

on behalf of the sanderling-team (Lenze Hofstee, Gunnar Thor Hallgrimsson, Kirsten Grond, Toon Voets, Sharon van den Eertwegh and Koos Dijksterhuis)