



Bears eating bird eggs

Polar bears stranded due to ice melting are 'devastating' barnacle geese population, study finds

Polar bears stranded on land due to diminishing ice are eating thousands of eggs of barnacle geese that migrate to Svalbard each year, researchers said today.

"It is a tragedy to witness two species of conservation concern clashing over the right to survive, and demonstrates very graphically the tensions the natural world is experiencing now," said Martin Spray, chief executive of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, which observed ten polar bears for eight weeks this summer.

Polar bears, especially on the west coast of Spitsbergen, are unable to reach the seal colonies where they normally feed, according to a project summary by WWT. Instead, one bear was seen

See EGGS, page 3



An excavation team examines fossil samples during a two-and-a-half week dig at Janusfjellet in this image from one of four Web cameras broadcasting their work live at forskning.no. A potentially new marine reptile species is among the finds of the expedition ending Wednesday.

A prehistoric fish story

New species may be among discoveries at dinosaur fossil site

They may have discovered yet another species of dinosaur. On the other hand, they ran out of cheese and coffee while their camp was being buried under mid-August snow.

This year's excavation by a team at Janusfjellet is being called a "great success" by participants. In addition to removing previously located marine reptile fossils, workers found a sea creature that Jørn Hurum, the project's leader, said is unprecedented.

"This fish lizard does not look normal," the paleontologist at the Natural History Museum in Oslo told *Dagbladet*. "The skeleton is the strangest and most interesting I have ever found by type. The fossil we found has nearly no flippers at all."

Hurum emphasized years of study remain to determine the significance of the fossil, which is in poor condition.

The team also found a 40-centimeter-long leg bone from a swan-lizard during the two-and-a-half week excavation that ends Wednesday. Hurum said future excavations will look for the remainder, hoping to discover its overall appearance.

A total of 11 skeletons – six plesiosaurs and five ichthyosaurs – have been found at the foot of the mountain since excavations started in 2004. Hurum said there may be as many as 1,000 skeletons in the area.

"We almost stumble into skeletons here,"

See EXCAVATE, page 3

Inside

Trash lottery; testing a new jet Page 2

Headlines from Svalbardposten
 - Health minister probes hospital's readiness
 - Size of Store Norske gold project a concern
 - Long-delayed car wash may open this fall
 Page 3

Weather forecast Page 3

Events calendar Page 4

Wow, we were stupid

An article in the Aug. 3 issue of *Icepeople* stated Margrete Keyser is uncertain if the high number of polar bear encounters in Svalbard this year will continue, since it's unknown where they may appear and human behavior is a significant factor. Keyser did not characterize this year's encounters as high – that was an observation made by other sources. We apologize and ask she not hide bacon in our tent during our next camping trip.

Treaty gets operatic birthday bash

Vets, others honored on anniversary of Svalbard's sovereignty

Celebrating a treaty with opera may seem like a strange match, but the performance art literally means "work" – and the Svalbard Treaty required decades of that.

About 50 residents and international visitors gathered Saturday at Svalbard Church to observe the 85th anniversary of the treaty giving Norway sovereignty of the archipelago, albeit with unique conditions.

"Today we have a flag day on Svalbard that is not on the calendar – and there are very few Norwegians with memory of why we mark it," said Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø.

See SOVEREIGNTY, page 4



Leif Jone Ølberg, right, performs a solo operatic selection during a National Day ceremony Saturday at Svalbard Church.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

OK, maybe it's still a bit too early



Snowmobiles in Longyearbyen get a dusting of summer snow during a series of flurries that brought several inches of snow to some parts of Svalbard during the past week. Longyearbyen received 1.1 centimeters of precipitation between Thursday and Monday, according to the Norwegian Meteorological Institute. The institute also states there was no official "snow depth" during those days, despite visual evidence suggesting otherwise. Temperatures in Svalbard and mainland Norway have been below normal much of the summer despite record heat being felt throughout much of the world, including other Arctic regions.

Briefly

Trash 'lottery' winners clear 96 km of beaches

It's a lottery with no real losers, even if the prize literally is garbage.

A total of 131 cubic meters of trash was cleared along 96 kilometers of beaches in northern Spitsbergen by 23 volunteers selected for the 11th annual cleanup. It is the second-highest volume, trailing the 155 cubic meters collected last year.

A total of 1,083 cubic meters of refuse has been cleared along 406 kilometers of shore since the campaign was launched by the Svalbard governor's office. Items and debris from fishing fleets, trawler nets, household waste carried from settlements by the sea, and other items are a long-running threat to wildlife.

More than 150 people entered this year's drawing for a chance to make one of two three-day trips to the beaches at the beginning of this month. The garbage will be brought to the waste facility in Longyearbyen.

French researchers look for the origin of insects

It won't make mosquitos less irritating, but maybe we'll finally know who's to blame.

A five-member team from the French National Museum of Natural History is analyzing the fossils of terrestrial arthropods in Dicksonland in the hope of filling wide information gaps in the evolution of insects. The team intends to date when the first terrestrial insects derived from their marine ancestors and when winged insects appeared, according to the Svalbard Science Forum.

"In this area we find a continuous stratigraphical record ranging from the Devonian, the age of the origin of insects, until the Mis-

sissippian, when the insect lineage underwent a sudden major radiation" said Jean-Claude Roy, the team's geologist, in a prepared statement.

The team spent a month in the field collecting samples and data to be investigated in-depth.

Boeing to test new jet at Longyearbyen Airport

Boeing plans to test its 787-8 Dreamliner at Longyear Airport in September and is hoping to use the airfield as an emergency landing field when the planes are put into commercial operation, according to NRK.

The Norwegian Civil Aviation Authority approved the landing and takeoff tests, which will be conducted without passengers.

The 787-8 is a long-range, mid-sized, twin-engine jet that seats 210 to 330 passengers, depending on variant. Boeing states it is the company's most fuel-efficient airliner and the world's first major airliner to use composite materials for most of its construction.

Seals offering scientists sea data by satellite

Nine seals ringed with advanced satellite tags are providing researchers with information about temperature, salinity and algal production in the seas of Svalbard this summer.

Scientists with the Norwegian Polar Institute finished placing the tags on the seals at Nordaustlandet this week, according to an institute blog of the project. One of the seals "has been swimming far into the ice covered Arctic Ocean and already reached 84° N," while another has made significant progress eastward.

Observers hoped to place ten tags on seals, but one of the devices malfunctioned.



Snow blankets the excavation camp at Janusfjellet, slowing work and chilling workers who ran out of some supplies such as coffee, in this image from a live Web camera at forskning.no.

Lots of fossils, sparse supplies

EXCAVATE, from page 1

Hurum told forskning.no, which broadcast the excavation live on four Web cameras.

The most noteworthy previous discovery is the 2007 unveiling of "Predator X," claimed to be the world's largest and most dangerous plesiosaur. The paleontologist is also notorious for co-leading the high-profile and highly controversial reassembly and analysis of the "Ida" fossil discovered in Germany, touted as the missing link between primates and humans in evolution.

This year's 14-member team set out to excavate two previously discovered ichthyosaurs and one plesiosaur, marine reptiles that inhabited Earth 150 million years ago. They were unable to finish removing of one of the speci-

mens, which will be targeted in the future.

The participants, in addition to being viewed live by thousands online, sent frequent blogs and tweets. But while the technology might have been cutting edge for the Arctic wilderness, more fundamental parts of camp life were less so.

Tea with caffeine pills was a poor substitute when the coffee ran out, and the chill of a summer snowstorm turned food into a rock-hard extraction project as well, wrote Bjørnar Kjensli, a journalist at forskning.no.

"The butter just becomes harder and harder, and honey must be chopped out of the box with a pocket knife," he wrote.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Cut off from seals, bears turn to birds

EGGS, from page 1

eating more than 1,000 eggs during one observation period alone, with other visits equally devastating.

"Of over 500 nests on the island, fewer than 40 were successful and most of them had very small clutch sizes of only one or two goslings," the WWT summary notes.

The barnacle geese, which migrate between Scotland and Svalbard, increased from 300 to more than 30,000 during the past 60 years due to conservation efforts. But only

half the expected numbers of goslings were seen as the flocks returned to Scotland during the past winter and it is thought the situation may be similar this winter.

The geese have historically been relatively safe on islands out of reach of the Arctic fox, their main nest predator. Researchers say they are hoping the birds will adapt their habits to reduce their nests' exposure to the increasing polar bear presence.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM

SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Hospital's readiness subject of health minister's visit

Questions about Longyearbyen Hospital's emergency preparedness are being addressed during a visit this week by Norwegian Health Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsens, with a report on the situation scheduled for completion Oct. 1. The hospital's limited facilities are long-known, with staffing levels unchanged since 1981, but questions rose anew following the high-profile attack by a polar bear on two kayakers earlier this month. Among the issues the minister is expected to discuss with local health officials are surgical readiness, increasing staff and ensuring reliable transfer of patients to the mainland. The visit was scheduled before the attack this spring.

Size of Store Norske's gold exploration triggers concern

Store Norske's exploration of Finnmark for gold is the largest intervention in a nature area of the region ever, according to the head of the area's reindeer grazing district. "It's made so many roads here that will stay in forever," said Nils Johan J Gaup in an interview with NRK Sámi Radio. County officials and reindeer herders have also expressed concern about damage to the area, with an official assessment of the situation planned. Store Norske officials say some gold has been found and exploration will continue, acknowledging a visually unappealing open pit will likely be part of at least their initial efforts.

Longyearbyen car wash may open this fall after long delay

A long-planned car wash in Longyearbyen will open this fall if final work and permitting goes as hoped, according to owner Frank-Johnny Olsen of Svalbard Motor. The used car wash from a gas station in Voss, now behind Longyearbyen's power station, was scheduled to open in 2008, but delays in paving a road to the facility and other planning resulted in delays. It will offer both machine- and self-wash options, with the latter also available for boats and bicycles. Olsen said he hopes to initially open the wash every other week in-between work shifts at Svea.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday

Partly cloudy, clearing later. NNE winds at 1 km/h. High 7C (7C wind chill), low -1C (-1C wind chill).

Thursday

Mixed sun and clouds. NNE winds at 1 km/h. High 9C (9C wind chill), low 0C (0C wind chill).

Friday

Mixed sun and clouds. ESE winds at 2 km/h. High 5C (5C wind chill), low 2C (2C wind chill).

Saturday

Increasing clouds. SSE winds at 1 km/h. High 2C (2C wind chill), low 1C (1C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy clearing some late, 1C (1C), -1C (-1C); Monday, mostly cloudy, 1C (1C), -1C (-1C); Tuesday, cloudy, 1C (1C), -1C (-1C); Wednesday, cloudy, 0C (0C), -1C (-1C).

Data provided by yr.no



Benny Prasad plays his self-invented bongo guitar during an Aug. 10 concert at Svalbard Church. A seven-song collection by the native of India is available free at icepeople.net.

A world of miracles in music

Indian musician brings self-made bongo guitar to Svalbard as part of mission to play in every nation

Svalbard is a long journey when you're trying to travel to every country on Earth in record time, especially when you've already been to Norway.

But Benny Prasad has a spiritual connection to the northernmost stop on his pilgrimage that ties in with his message of faith and peace. Plus, despite reaching every country except Pakistan so far, he still encountered some firsts in the Arctic.

Prasad, a native of India, alternated instrumentals played on a bongo guitar he invented and stories of what he called God's miracles in overcoming a life of handicaps during an Aug. 10 concert at Svalbard Church.

He said he was born with severe asthma and

the steroids he took as treatment caused rheumatoid arthritis, 60 percent lung damage and immune system failure. His parents had high expectations nonetheless, and after falling short "I was beaten every day and locked up to study."

An encounter as a teen with God was the pivotal point in his life, Prasad said.

"God said 'You can be a blessing to kings and parliaments,'" he told the audience of about 40 at Svalbard Church. "I said 'If I can be a blessing to my father that will be enough.'"

Before playing his first song, "Tribes," Prasad asked the audience to think of an impossible situation, as the composition was a statement about physical handicaps that a doctor had said would make it impossible to play the guitar.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Treaty honored with speeches, libretto

SOVEREIGNTY, from page 1

The treaty, allowing all signatories equal right to engage in commercial activities, was signed only after a lengthy effort beginning in 1871. Disputes about its provisions continue to this day, particularly with Russia. But Ingerø said it "has laid the foundation for peace and stability in the North."

"I also think on a day like this it is appropriate to remember all those who have died in the mines at Svalbard and many other accidents where Svalbard's amazing, but brutal, nature has claimed its victims," he said. "And to those who lost their lives during the war. Also, a big thank you to those far down working countless days and years – often far away from family and friends – to build this community,

keep it in operation and progressing."

Sing-alongs of hymns and folk songs, plus a tribute to Svalbard veterans were among the other activities during the 90-minute celebration. But a dominant portion featured operatic solos, plus piano and violin performances, by Leif Jone Ølberg, 24, who is assisting his uncle, Priest Leif Magne Helgesen, at the church this summer.

"I suppose opera in Norway is not well-known and strange," said Ølberg, who is studying at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. He said he hopes to return, possibly with "a pianist and other vocalist or two," for a more full-fledged concert next year.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

Aug. 22

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Operasjon Froskeegg," Norwegian family film, all ages. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "She's Out Of My League," U.S. comedy/romance, all ages. Huset.

Aug. 23

First day of school and kindergarten.

Aug. 29

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Knight and Day," U.S. action/comedy, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Sept. 1

6 p.m.: Activity fair featuring local volunteer recreation clubs. Svalbardhallen.

Sept. 5

6 p.m.: Movie: "Shrek – Happily Ever After," U.S. animated film with Norwegian subtitles, no age limit. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Killers," U.S. action/comedy, ages 15 and up. Huset.

Sept. 6

5 p.m.: Svalbard Turn's 80th anniversary celebration. Sports competitions, gymnastics exhibition and other events. Svalbardhallen.

Sept. 7

10 a.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

Sept. 13

10:15 a.m.: Environment and Industry Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

Sept. 15

8 p.m.: Meeting to discuss opening of cultural center. Næringsbygget 2, Smutthullet room.

Sept. 16

2 p.m.: Board for Culture and Leisure Business Authority meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra room.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Massive Greenland ice sheet breaks off*
- *Weather chaos a sign of climate change*
- *Punch to nose fends off polar bear*
- *Century-old Scotch in Antarctic ice*