



SVALBARD'S 10 STRANGEST STORIES OF 2013

january



BBC TWO

april



GREENPEACE

october



UNCREDITED

december



MARK SABBATINI

A polar bear, far right, rattles more than the cage of a documentary narrator as "The Polar Bear Family and Me" set off a controversy that cost a local filmmaker dearly and forced the cancellation of several projects. Not as successful shaking things up was a Greenpeace protestor at the North Pole, second from left, whose hopes of disrupting a first-ever political conference there were thwarted. More chaos might have been caused by the Abominable Snowman, second from right, had a geneticist's claim of DNA proof of its existence not been exposed as total bunk. While Longyearbyen's official (if short-lived) Christmas tree was at the other end of the natural selection scale, at least it was real.

The ways we were weird

Boffo bears, Russian rainbows, flesh-eating flora and twerpy tree top ways globe sees us as goofy



COURTESY OF QUEER.DE

Rainbow flags and other decorations are left throughout Barentsburg in August by an activist protesting Russia's new anti-gay law.

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

"Longyearbyen's like any normal small town" is a phrase that gets exactly zero matches in a Google search.

The weirdness of everyday life in Svalbard is the stuff of hundreds of travelogues annually, and it's a sure bet heads will be turned worldwide several times a year at things locals may not consider more than mildly odd.

This year is no different in seeing plenty of incidents provoking everything from laugh-

ter to outrage. Here, in roughly chronological order, are our picks for the ten most bizarre:

Bear of a Film: A polar bear rattling the cage of a documentary narrator became a viral internet hit at the beginning of the year and set off a controversy for a local filmmaker that's still raging strong. Jason Roberts was fined 50,000 kroner and was forced to cancel multiple projects this year after the governor said the scene from the BBC documentary "The Polar Bear Family and Me" violated Svalbard's

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Aliens are invading! Help!

Governor drafts battle plan for invasive species in Svalbard as part of national reporting effort

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Some are like the Borg, in that resistance is futile. Others merely kill and consume the natives like the Xenomorphs, although it may not take someone as badass as Sigourney Weaver to stop them.

A battle plan for combating those alien life
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NIGEL YOCOCOZ / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

"Very difficult to combat:" At best, Svalbard's governor is hoping to limit the spread of voles.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

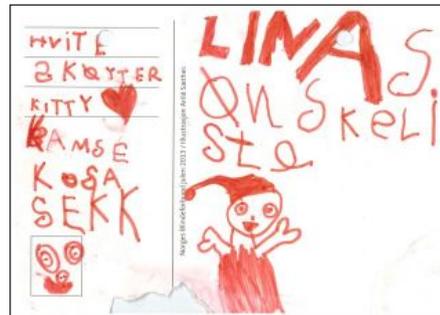
A gargantuan gift getting unwrapped



APO ARKITEKTER



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



BYDRIFT



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

As a surprise gift to Longyearbyen, the world's largest Santa's mailbox, depicted in illustration at top left, will be unveiled at 2 p.m. Sunday at Sjøområdet (Vei 606 B). Children are invited to drop off cards and letters, their second chance this year after the traditional depositing of correspondence to Santa, including the postcard at lower left, in the mailbox at the foot of Mine 2B during the first Sunday of Advent. The 9.3-meter-high mailbox is a gift from Po Lin Lee, a Hong Kong native, who paid LNS Spitsbergen several hundred thousand kroner to construct the box in secret. At top right, The Longyearbyen Blandakor performs last Sunday during a Christmas concert at Svalbard Church featuring a variety of local musicians. At bottom right, Sigrid Halgunset, foreground, and Lilly Pedersen, lead a procession of local youths through the Longyearbyen Library on Friday during a Saint Lucia's Day celebration that also included their singing traditional songs in Lompensenteret.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We may be finally seeing the end of photos of Prince Harry's Awesome Arctic Adventure every time the tabloids write about him, as the **British royal reached the South Pole last week with the same wounded veterans' group he toured with in Svalbard.** Unlike the expedition to the North Pole, which he had to bail out early to go to his brother's wedding, he stayed with the other six team members for the entire three-week, 320-kilometer ski trek in temperatures as low as -35C. Two other seven-man teams, representing the United States and the Commonwealth, also participated in the expedition to raise funds for Walking With The Wounded, with the idea being they'd race to the Pole. But the race part got called off because it was putting "undue strain" on the participants due to the unfamiliar terrain ... A more regal display of Svalbard's royal presence abroad came three days earlier as **Thailand's Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn unveiled her exhibit "Traveling Photos, Photos Traveling" at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre on Dec. 10.** A profile picture of the princess superimposed above an aerial shot of Svalbard's mountains, taken during her visit



COURTESY OF WALKING WITH THE WOUNDED

Can we stop talking about his balls now? Britain's Prince Harry, left, who infamously bitched about his freezing his "family jewels" in Svalbard, looks "hot" with a new beard at the South Pole, according to the tabloids.

here in March, greets visitors at the entrance to the 173-photo display. A selection of the photos can be seen at namfah.com ... Finally, while not qualifying for our "10 weirdest" list, **Surfer Today is calling attention to Gerard-Jan Daniel Goekoop of Holland for another "world's northernmost" record, specifically for windsurfing alongside the pack-ice of the Arctic Ocean at 80° 40.3' N., 13° 43' E.**

When rocky prospects are good prospects



KEI OGATA / UNIS

Kim Senger, above, analyzes rocks on a hillside near Longyearbyen in July of 2011 as part of his three-year effort to determine the feasibility of storing CO2 several hundred meters beneath the subsurface of Adventdalen for his PhD thesis, which he defended Monday at the University of Bergen. Senger, conducting his work through The University Centre in Svalbard, focused much of his effort on the possibility of CO2 leakage via rocks that reach the surface, concluding it is unlikely.

His work is part of a large-scale effort to bring a full-scale storage site to Svalbard that could store 20 years of emissions for Longyearbyen's coal-fired power plant, as depicted in the illustration at right.



UNI CIPR

Governor tries to stop invading aliens

SPECIES, from page 1

forms, at least when possible, has been drafted by Svalbard's governor and he is seeking strategic input from civilians before submitting it the national authorities.

The plan to stop, or slow, the rapid growth of invasive species in Svalbard due primarily to climate change is part of a national initiative seeking to document all of Norway's native species. Guri Tveito, the governor's environmental chief, notes in the report that such species have caused considerable trouble and expense elsewhere.

"An example from the mainland is the salmon parasite, *Gyrodactylus salaris*, which was found during inspections in the '70s (and) and have an annual cost for Norwegian society of around 250 million kroner," she wrote.

The plan declares "climate change is already noticeable in inspections on Svalbard" and "it is not possible to combat all species."

"In the ocean, we have virtually no opportunities to stop a species that is spreading," it states.

Snow and king crabs, for example, are listed as high-risk species that are rapidly spreading north, with some already caught here. The plan recommends increased scrutiny at docks in Barentsburg and Svea "in order to ensure that no coal vessels entails crabs or other harmful organisms from ballast water."

The plan (in Norwegian) is available at tinyurl.com/qzafxjs. The deadline for comments is Jan. 20.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Higher rents anger residents; companies blame warming

Skyrocketing rents for non-subsidized housing in Longyearbyen is a growing concern for many residents, who say they are being forced to move to smaller and/or lower-quality places. "Our rent went up from less than 3,000 a month to nearly 10,500 kroner," said Therese Berger, 29, who lives with her husband and their three-year-old son in a 68-square-meter apartment owned by Store Norske. She said the aging apartment has cracks in the walls, a poorly functioning radiator and other problems. Håvar Fjerdingøy, administrative director of Store Norske's property subsidiary, said the company is charged a fixed per-square-meter rate that aims to be in the "middle range" for Longyearbyen. He and officials with two other property companies said several factors are contributing to higher rents, most notably the need for increased repairs and other work necessitated by climate change.

Norwegian gov't, not locals, to pay for landslide projects

Efforts to prevent landslides in Longyearbyen will be the responsibility off the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate, saving the city and Store Norske from absorbing the large costs associated with the work. There have been 20 large slides in the Longyearbyen area since 1991 resulting in costly projects for the city and/or mining company, with scientists predicting the risk is increasingly significantly due to climate change. An assessment ordered in March of 2012 by the previous Labor-led Norwegian government concluded that "Svalbard should be considered on an equal basis with municipalities on the mainland by the prioritization of technical and financial assistance."

Study: 90 percent of fulmars have plastic in stomachs

Ninety percent of fulmars in Svalbard analyzed by scientists had plastic in their stomachs, a significant increase since the last similar study during the 1980s, according to the Norwegian Polar Institute. Researchers said the results are not surprising, since disposal of plastics at sea is becoming a major problem.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 39 km/h. High -1C (-7C wind chill), low -5C (-10C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. SE winds to 32 km/h. High -4C (-9C wind chill), low -15 (-11C wind chill).	Cloudy. SE winds to 32 km/h. High -4C (-9C wind chill), low -6C (-12C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds to 29 km/h. High -5C (-10C wind chill), low -7C (-12C wind chill).
24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness

Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -5C (-10C), -7C (-12C), light 0:00h; Monday, cloudy, -6C (-11C), -8C (-14C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -8C (-16C), -14C (-22C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -13C (-20C), -15C (-23C), light 0:00h

Data provided by storm.no



ANNA VADER / UNIS

That's no ordinary plant: The first discovery of a flowering species in Svalbard in nearly 40 years wasn't all roses, as it turns out this alpine butterwort likes to suck the life out of flesh. That makes for great headlines, even if people reading the story are let down by the revelation only insects are at risk.

Svalbard stays strange in '13

BIZARRE, from page 1

wildlife protection laws. Roberts still says he did nothing wrong and the only people not praising the documentary are a few journalists and other gadflies.

This Festival is Da Bomb: Getting in trouble for drawing a huge crowd would have been a relative dream come true for organizers of the inaugural Tromsø International Film Festival in Svalbard. The four-day festival in January struggled to top 20 viewers at most screenings – and most of them were journalists and festival officials. One film attracted a single person. Officials nonetheless said they're planning an encore and it's possible their optimism isn't totally misplaced since a local audience for movies definitely exists: literally minutes after the festival ended, the regular Sunday night movie ("Les Misérables") attracted a sellout crowd with more people than all of the festival's films combined.

Chief convict: One of Svalbard's more sordid stories came to a conclusion in March when former Store Norske leader Robert Hermansen was released from a Tromsø prison after serving a 15-month sentence for "gross corruption." He described the experience as brutally surprising because he expected "a sort of school camp, where I could go home and pick up a book if I wanted."

Vegging at the Top of the World: This year's novelties and epic quests at the North Pole in April included the first-ever vegan winner of the North Pole Marathon, with Fiona Oakes, 43, blowing away the women's record time by 44 minutes despite running with only one kneecap. The first-ever political conference went about its boring business despite Greenpeace showing up with a protest flag they littered the seabed with. Coming up limp was an announced first-ever North Pole stag party that failed to show.

Not the Northernmost: Hammerfest continued a long-running feud with Honningsvåg about which is the "world's northernmost city" by applying for a patent to the

title, which was laughed off by officials as conveying no useful information to the public. Not to mention both cities are at about 70 degrees North, which is more than a margin-of-error thing compared to Longyearbyen.

Viral vacancy: A help-wanted ad from the governor seeking a summer polar bear guard attracted about 300 thrill seekers worldwide, and probably a similar number of news articles ridiculing them for their death wish. The three-week job in July ended up going to local resident Andreas Eriksson, who said the most noteworthy event was seeing a swan in Svalbard for the first time.

Russian Rainbows: Barentsburg visitors were greeted with rainbow flags and other paraphernalia in August, courtesy of a German student who scattered them about in protest of Russia's new law criminalizing homosexual "propaganda." "Some local people have looked at me funny and began to call," but nobody halted his efforts, he said.

Predator Plant: As if Svalbard didn't have enough fearsome creatures, we now have flesh-eating plants to deal with. Anna Vader, a UNIS marine biologist made the summer discovery of the species known as alpine butterwort, which sucks the life from insects that get trapped on the pod-like leaves.

Bogus Bigfoot: "Junk science" lived up to its name when Bryan Sykes, a geneticist at the University of Oxford, claimed in October he had a "100 percent match" between the yeti (a.k.a. Abominable Snowman) in the Himalayas and polar bears in Svalbard. It dominated global headlines for all of a day, upon which it was revealed the "yeti" hair samples were from brown bears.

O' Christmas Twig: In Svalbard's version of "A Charlie Brown Christmas," the scraggy wisp of a tree is unceremoniously hauled away in the dead of night and replaced with a lush specimen ten times its size. But while the original sprig was mocked locally and nationally as maybe Norway's most pathetic Christmas tree ever, some locals pined for it out of sentimental loyalty because, well, it's Svalbard.

What's up

Dec. 18

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug," U.S. drama, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 20

8 p.m.: Movie: "Kill Buljo 2," Norwegian comedy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 22

2 p.m.: Debut of world's biggest Santa's mailbox. Children invited to drop letters and cards. Sjømrådet (Vei 606 B)

4 p.m.: Movie: "Solan og Ludvig: Jul i Flåklypa," Norwegian family film, all ages. Kulturhuset.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Walking With Dinosaurs" (3D), U.S. animated/adventure dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Kill Buljo 2," Norwegian comedy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 24

2 p.m. and 4 p.m.: Christmas Eve mass. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 25

Noon: Christmas Mass. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 26

Noon: Santa March, registration and start at Svalbardhallen.

5 p.m.: Movie: "Justin Bieber's Believe," U.S. documentary, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Walking With Dinosaurs," U.S. animated/adventure dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 27

5 p.m.: Christmas Tree festival. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 29

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," U.S. drama/comedy, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Frost" (3D) U.S. animated/adventure film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

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:

- *Arctic melt gets 'bit of a break' in 2013*
- *Diamond mines may be in Antarctica*
- *Russia gives amnesty to "Arctic 30"*
- *Santa gets heat for military fighter escort*