



SVALBARD SCIENCE FORUM

← **GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS**

Polar bears in Svalbard see big drop in PCB blood levels, but Glaucous Gull deaths linked to toxins.

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PERMAFROST PLUNGE →

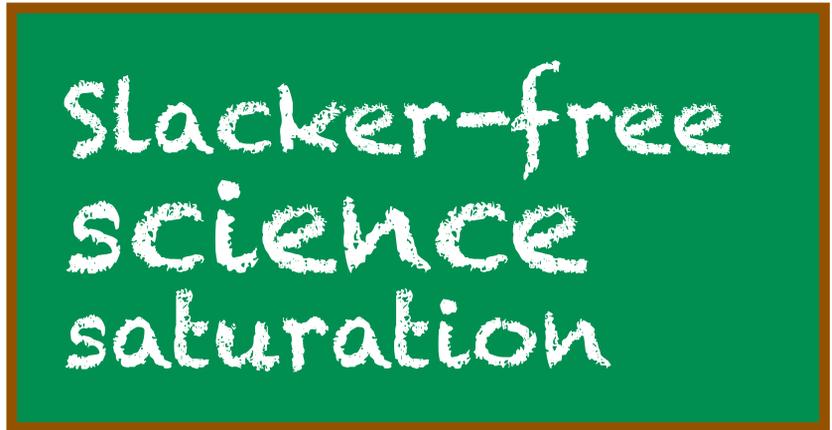
Four-year study by 11 countries of impacts due to climate change underway at UNIS.

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ULRICH NEUMANN / UNIS

Spring break? Hah!
**GET READY
 TO CRAM
 WITH OUR**



NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

← **SECRET-HOME SPIES**

Tracking tags show Svalbard's Kittiwakes spend winters on open sea between Newfoundland and Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

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BUREAUCRATIC BLUR →

Two days of presentations from energy and environment summit in Longyearbyen go online.

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LONGYEARBYEN LOKALSTRYE

'Band-aid' or bleed 'every last drop?'

New environmental minister asks for climate help, but world wants share of rich resources

By **MARK SABBATINI**
 Editor

Nordic politicians gathered in Svalbard are asking the world for a band-aid. The smart money is betting they're bloodthirsty. Meanwhile, it's much of the rest of the world that's feeling wounded.

The long-running contrast between words, actions and results – and likelihood it'll get more pronounced in the future – was

evident as new Norwegian Environmental Minister Bård Vegar Solhjell made his first trip to Svalbard this week. Meeting with fellow ministers from other Nordic countries, he emphasized the need to reduce soot and methane emissions that are a large factor in the Arctic warming at twice the rate as elsewhere.

"There is a great need for independent initiatives that can provide rapid reduction in emissions of short-lived climate drivers such as soot," he said in a statement afterward. "Such efforts must be directed at efforts in both industrialized and developing countries."

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Notice: Next issue of Icepeople is April 10 due to the Easter holiday. So you have lots of time to study.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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Copyright stuff

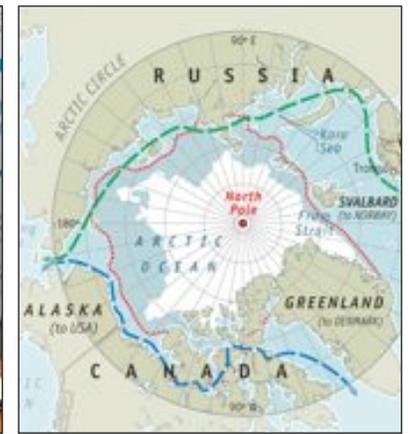
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Corrections policy

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.



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Bård Vegar Solhjell, left, Norway's new environmental minister, listens to a presentation at The University Centre in Svalbard during a visit this week with ministers from other Nordic countries. At right, a map depicts potential major commercial shipping routes (green and blue lines) that may open up due to the shrinking Arctic ice sheet. The existing summer ice sheet is shown in white, while average coverage between 1979 and 2000 is shown in red.

Seeking shared wealth for sacrifice

NORDIC, from page 1

But calls for shared sacrifice aren't going over well among many in the outside world, who feel Nordic countries aren't as communal when it comes to sharing the potential wealth of the north's natural resources.

Furthermore, the enormity of that potential is reflected by businesses and investors who, unconcerned with politics beyond its effect on the bottom line, are placing their bets on striking it rich in oil and other industries.

Norway's willingness to allow exploration in the Arctic is evident in new rounds of bidding for oil and gas licensing announced this week, with 105 of 134 blocks in the Barents Sea, with the rest in the Norwegian or North Sea. A year ago the government awarded 34 North Sea licenses and four in the Barents Sea.

"The proposal I am submitting for consultation is based on the companies' nominations and indicate very clearly that the petroleum industry is moving north," Oil Minister Ola

Borten Moe said in a statement.

The Norwegian Arctic is "the incredibly safe way to invest in some of the most exciting oil finds in the world," according to the investment publication *Street Authority*. Paul Tracy, an analyst for the guide, extols the earning potential of Statoil, Norway's state-owned oil company, citing the sizable amount of oil in the Arctic and the company's ability to get "every last drop" out of its current work in the North Sea.

"It's a solid buy for even the most conservative investors," he wrote.

Not surprisingly, countries without Arctic territory are trying to grab a share – or at least a say – in commercial activity. China, for instance, is testing an Arctic commercial shipping route and is seeking Arctic Council observer status. But the council is clearly reluctant to add members.

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

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Last week we mentioned a man seriously injured while illegally paragliding is facing serious charges and that he's long been warned to stop the illegal flights. This week we've noticed "for-sale" notices of a glider and related equipment posted on the usual community bulletin boards. We're just sayin' ... Given our obsession about the new "Cold War" we gotta plug the new mass-market thriller novel "Arctic Rising" by Tobias S. Buckell. The Bond-esque narrative takes place in an utterly plausible world that's been drastically affected by climate change with worse to come, with the main benefactors now being the nations racing to capture all the oil they can from the Arctic since the ice cap has mostly melted. Of course the reality of this situation isn't enough to make an appealing novel (sigh), so the twist is something called the Gaia Corporation has invented an anti-warming device consisting of thousands of tiny floating mirrors that reflect the sun's heat back into space. It seems this

also turns out to be a potential superweapon. There's also the smugglers who've brought a nuke into area for evil purposes. Enter our heroine, Anika Duncan, "an airship pilot for the underfunded United Nations Polar Guard," who apparently has to save the Earth all on her own unless there's some romantic interest involved (the synopsis doesn't say). Also, there's some Skywalker-to-the-Dark-Side fodder at end. Anyhow, e-book versions are available from the usual sources and might make lighter camp reading than the real-life doomed North Pole balloon expedition we recommended in the last issue ... But if you want more reality, here's a defining moment from the modern recreating of the 1856 Arctic voyage of Lord Dufferin of Clandeboye in "Frost on My Moustache" by Tim Moore: "The moment when, slushing his way towards a supermarket on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, he realizes that the posters that describe polar bears arriving on top of unwary – and unarmed – tourists in 'great, supple leaps' aren't kidding."



NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Jenny Bytingsvik, left, and Jon Aars examine a tranquilized polar bear while a cub watches. Bytingsvik says PCB levels in the bears is too high, but a study showing blood levels of the pollutant down by more than half during the past decade is an encouraging sign ban on PCBs is working.

PCB levels down in polar bears

Decade-long study in Svalbard finds pollutants down nearly 60 percent in blood of bear cubs

There's finally a bit of good news for polar bears in Svalbard threatened by the loss of ice and prey due to climate change: PCB levels in their blood has declined by more than half during the past decade, according to a study.

PCB amounts have declined up to 59 percent in polar bear cubs and 55 percent in their mothers between 1998 and 2008, according to researchers at the Norwegian University of

Science and Technology. PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), once widely used as a cooling fluids and insulators in electric motors, were banned by many industrialized countries 30 years ago and internationally in 2004.

"Even though the PCB levels we found are still too high, this shows that international agreements to ban PCBs have had an effect," said Jenny Bytingsvik, an NTNU biologist completing her doctoral dissertation on the findings.

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

Declining gull flock linked to toxins

Survival rates of contaminated birds less than 50 percent, may result in endangered listing

A link between a drastic decline in Bjørnøya's Glaucous Gull population during the past few decades and environmental toxins is established for the first time in a newly published study.

Samples from dead and dying gulls show the survival rates of adults with high levels of toxins is between 40 and 50 percent, compared with 91.5 percent for birds with low levels,

according to the study by the Norwegian Polar Institute and Norwegian Institute for Nature Research. Other factors such as food shortages and climate change are also seen as contributing to the population drop.

The gulls are designated as "Near Threatened" in the Red List of endangered species in Norway. But researchers say they will recommend upgrading that status if additional studies show similar results for birds in Svalbard.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Seed vault closed to visitors for lacking emergency exit

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault has been closed to visitors because it lacks an emergency exit. Longyearbyen's fire department enacted the restriction after discussing concerns raised by the Ministry of Agriculture, building consultants for the Norwegian government and other officials. The ministry originally decided no visitors would be permitted after the original opening in 2008, but relented under heavy pressure to allow special dignitaries. But the number of visitors has been increasing – there were 41 last year, more than half of them from media organizations – resulting in the issue resurfacing.

Two loose dogs kill reindeer, governor considers charges

Two dogs that got loose outside cabins fatally attacked reindeer in separate incidents last week, according to the Svalbard governor's office. A dog that escaped a cabin at Vestpynten attacked a reindeer last Monday and "the animal was so damaged that it had to be euthanized," said First Lt. Rune Fred Jensen. Another dog tied up outside a Spitsbergen Travel cabin at Brentskardet got loose and killed a reindeer calf Tuesday morning. While punishments for the owners are being considered, "in cases where the escape had been free of the owner's control it is difficult to review and impose fines," Jensen said.

Peak registration boxes put out early at three ski spots

Three registration boxes have been placed at the summits of three popular ski sites by Svalbard Turn, which offers a prize drawing to people scaling a set number of peaks. "We believe we will have more participants and encourage more physical activity (because the) ski boxes will extend the period for certain destinations," said Marthe Strøm Solli, a member of the city's recreation organization. The first trio of boxes are at Trollsteinen, Fuglefjella and Nordenskiöldtoppen, with those for other peaks near Longyearbyen scheduled to be set out June 1. Adults who scale ten peaks and children who climb five by Sept. 30 are eligible for a prize drawing.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. SE winds to 35 km/h. High -4C (-12C wind chill), low -7C (-14C wind chill).	Cloudy. SE winds to 25 km/h. High -9C (-13C wind chill), low -12C (-17C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NE winds to 15 km/h. High -12C (-19C wind chill), low -17C (-25C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NW at 18 km/h. High -16C (-24C wind chill), low -18C (-26C wind chill).
Sunrise 5:41a; sunset 6:32p	Sunrise 5:33a; sunset 6:39p	Sunrise 5:25a; sunset 6:47p	Sunrise 5:17a; sunset 6:54p
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -13C (-19C), -17C (-25C), light 13:53h; Monday, p. cloudy, -13C (-19C), -16C (-22C), light 14:08h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -14C (-19C), -16C (-22C), light 14:24h; Wednesday, cloudy, -13C (-18C), -13C (-23C), light 14:40h			
Data provided by yr.no			

Lightbulb vigilantes



LONGYEARBYEN LOKALSTYRE

Energy-efficient LED light bulbs illuminate the road along Bykaia during a test of lights by the city during the past winter. Results showed the bulbs are 75 percent more efficient and can save Longyearbyen more than 200,000 kroner a year if installed citywide, said Marianne Aasen, general manager of Bydrift, the city's utility agency, during a two-day environmental and energy conference last month. The city is planning a full installation of the bulbs during the next year. Aasen's presentation was one of 27 at the conference, with the slide presentations for each posted in PDF format by the city at www.lokalstyre.no.

Permafrost study seeks new depths

Four-year, 11-nation project will seek unprecedented levels of data by digging deeper into ice

When they say the world needs people digging holes in the ground, this group may prove that's literally true while doing work that's anything but menial.

A four-year study of Svalbard's permafrost featuring participants from 11 countries aims to go more in-depth than any previous research. Not just in the scope of data, but in the actual depth of the terrain studied, as new equipment will allow drilling up to 25 times deeper than typical studies.

Field work is starting this week in Adventdalen for the PAGE21 project, which began last November with meetings by scientists with 18 international institutions including The University Centre in Svalbard. The nearly €10 million project will combine field measurements of permafrost processes, pools and fluxes with remote sensing data and global climate models

at local, regional and, for the first time, pan-Arctic scales.

"The output from this research will help to advance our understanding of permafrost processes at multiple scales, resulting in improvements in global numerical permafrost modeling and the ensuing future climate projections," the group wrote in a prepared statement.

The project will also study in permafrost in other Arctic areas including Ny-Ålesund, northeast Greenland, north Sweden, and Samoylov Island and Kytalyk in Russia.

A specially designed hydraulic drill will allow researchers to penetrate sediments and bedrock to collect ice cores up to 50 meters long. Previous studies in Svalbard relying on hand drilling typically resulted in two-meter cores. The layers of the cores offer insight into precipitation and climate from past years.

More information about the project is available at www.page21.eu.

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

Winter home of Kittiwakes located

Tiny trackers shine a light on secret domain of Svalbard birds – it's the middle of the open sea

Since bird watchers typically don't spend winters floating in the middle of open sea, the cold-weather home of this particular flock was understandably a long-lasting mystery.

But the winter home of Kittiwakes who spend summers in Svalbard has been revealed by researchers using tiny trackers that recorded

light intensity every 10 minutes. The simple data revealed 80 percent of an estimated 4.5 million Kittiwakes overwinter in the open sea between Newfoundland and the Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

Birds from 19 colonies were fitted with the trackers in 2008 and 2009, and recaptured last year. The birds are on Norway's Red List of endangered species in Norway.

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

What's up

March 28

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Hunger Games," U.S. action/drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

March 30

9 a.m.: Board of Growing Enterprising Authority meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

6 p.m.: Call to Worship and Confirmation. Svalbard Church.

March 31

Dogsledding classes for various experience levels, offered at varying times. Details available at www.longyearbyenhundeklubb.no.

Meter reading Q1 due.

Deadline to submit nominations for Tyfus statuette and Youth Culture Grant, presented during the Norwegian Constitution Day celebration May 16. Details about the awards available at www.lokalstyre.no.

April 1

6 p.m.: Movie: "Mirror Mirror," U.S. drama/family, no age limit specified, Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Hugo Cabret" (3D), U.S. drama/family, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 3

1 p.m.: Holiday Mass in Ny-Ålesund.

7 p.m.: Gathering with presentation by Priest Elisa Stokka. Svalbard Church.

April 4

6 p.m.: Movie: "American Pie: Reunion" (3D), U.S. comedy/romance, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

April 5

7 p.m.: Maundy Thursday Mass by Priest Elisa Stokka. Svalbard Church.

April 5

1 p.m.: Outdoor Mass at Vindodden.

April 7

11 a.m.: Easter Mass. Svalbard Church.

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:

- *675 Russians rescued from drifting ice*
- *Damage to oceans to reach \$2B a year*
- *Freakish winter helps U.S. economy*
- *Zoos the last hope to save polar bears?*