

East Greenland July 2017

Robin Hood brings a veterinarian on site

Also this year Robin Hood returned to East Greenland. It is interesting to see how much has already changed for the better in Tasiilaq and Robin Hood was significantly involved in these changes. Everywhere you can see the white dog huts that are built in the social project of young Inuit.

This was the first step Robin Hood made and these huts are still being built. They are an important protection, especially for the puppies and mother dogs. By wind and rain all dogs are grateful for that.

At last there's also water at the big dog place, Robin Hood has taken care of it. From the airport in Kulusuk we get 1000 l water canister again and again, and we pass it on to the dog owners. But they have to bring them to Tasiilaq with small boats across the Arctic Ocean.

A third component, in which Robin Hood is involved, is dog food. Lars Anker, a Dane who lives locally, cares for the production of high-quality dry food in Denmark. Robin Hood pays the freight costs for the ships, which are very high. This allows the selling of the food to the dog owners to a lower price, and many take advantage of the offer, especially if they are incapable to fish or to hunt, to provide food for the dogs.

There is still a massive lack of veterinary care. There is no veterinarian in the whole sledge dog district. This district stretches from the south of the polar circle to the north. Only Greenland dogs and no other dogs can be kept here. Vaccinations against rabies are prescribed by law, but everything else is in a mess. There are diseases like parvovirus and worms. Deworming is done with a horse wormer, which is not really compatible for puppies. There is also no vaccination and deworming scheme.

For this reason, Robin Hood has brought Dr. Borka Levente from Romania. He is an excellent veterinarian, also involved in our castration project, and an expert on wild animals. He even operates and heals bears.

What is pleasing is that now a new, young dog inspector is employed, to whom the dogs are also important. He controls daily if there is enough water. Unfortunately, it is also one of his duties to shoot dogs. For example puppies that are not wanted, old dogs, sick dogs.

Levi and I stayed there for two weeks. In the first week we couldn't leave Tasiilaq, because there was so much ice in the fjord, so it was impossible to drive there by the boat. It was unusually cold for July.

One of the first patients was a young mother dog. She has not been able to walk anymore since her puppies were born. Before we arrived, we tried to communicate with Egon, the dog owner, via Internet and asked for help. Finally on site Levi could help her, 10 days later she was back on her feet. Egon had to get vitamins from the local hospital and followed the advice to separate the bigger puppies, so that the mother had peace. Nor should she have any more birth this year.

It is interesting to see, that now more and more dog owners have built kennels for their puppies, where they can run, so they are safe from other dogs and they are protected from a fall into the deep.

Generally, much has changed in Tasiilaq since we started to help. Efraim, the new dog inspector, speaks English very well and with his translation we could talk with many dog owners.

Robin Hood brought two of the white dog kennels for Egon's mother dog and another female dog that was heavily pregnant. These dog kennels are standing everywhere around.

Even before we traveled to East Greenland, I planned a lecture where Levi could explain to the dog owners something about vaccination, deworming, diseases. We produced posters, flyers and there were even radio spots.

The evening, when the lecture took place, was exciting for me. Would any people come at all?

We were allowed to use a room in the assembly house where they offered tea and coffee. I bought fruit, biscuits and other sweets for the potential guests.

And then came the first visitors ... Danes ... that was clear ... they were interested. But more and more people came and with great pleasure I saw many Inuit among the visitors, old-established dog owners, of whom I had never thought they would be interested. Levi talked about the right vaccination scheme, about the proper deworming. We had a woman interpreter, Mia, who had efforts to translate Levi's lecture with all the terminology, but she mastered it very excellent.

And - there was also a dog. We were allowed to bring a dog into the house, something rather unusual for Greenland. Egon brought a big puppy, who was incredibly well-behaved. And this puppy allowed Levi to demonstrate how to use eye drops, etc. All visitors followed the event with great interest, asked questions ... they wanted us to visit their dogs and to look for them. I had to make a list ... and they wanted a Facebook group where we could exchange in the future. I was infinitely happy, that more than 30 participants in the small town had been there and among them the reputable dog owners, this was really a success! The next days we were engaged to examine dogs, Levi was able to take care for the dogs, one had a bad bite wound on his head ...

I found a dog which in my opinion was too thin and I told it to one of the female dog owners. The next day the owner visited us and wanted to know why I thought that something was wrong with his dog. We talked to each other and he was also interested and accepted our advice. This is also a novelty. I could see, the work of Robin Hood is accepted, the people are interested and they accept our advice and help. Also the water canisters are very popular. We get them from the airport of Kulusuk, and a lot of the dog owners wanted to have more of them. And the water pipeline should now be extended. But in Greenland everything needs time, so it wasn't possible to install it while I was there. And now that I am back home, it has become even more difficult. But I'll stay tuned, we'll make it.

At last the major part of the ice was removed from the fjord and we could visit some of the villages. First we drove to Kulusuk, over the Arctic Ocean ... it was extremely cold for July and here by the sea you have to wear warm winter clothes, even at the height of summer. It took a while to come to Kulusuk, because the ice did not want us to reach the pier. Egon circled around and looked for a way between the ice floes.

We also talked there with dog owners who were in bright turmoil because some adult dogs had died. Unfortunately, the reason is unknown until today. It can hardly be parvovirus, but what else?

Levi suspected too much fat in food in too short a time. I ask a pathologist in Vienna, he said it could also be a mercury poisoning ... because the meat of seals and whales, that is also used for dog food, is contaminated. Some whales are not eaten by humans anymore because it is too dangerous.

But the Greenlanders don't have many options for a balanced and fresh food. And the environmental pollution takes away the last opportunities - for the dogs and for themselves...

We went to Kummiut, where we stayed at the service house. This can be imagined as a youth hostel but with only one room. But there is a kitchen, shower ... and for Greenland conditions it is relatively cheap.

The boat trip also cost a lot of course, because Egon has to pay the fuel and spent his time ... In Greenland everything's expensive, but I'll try to explain, why these boat trips into the villages are really important.

In Kummiut we looked at all the dogs and got an impression of the situation. Unfortunately, I also could see there are still a lot of problems in the villages. No water for many dogs, thin dogs ...

Then we went over the Arctic Sea to Sermiligaaq, the village located as the farthest away.

This village has always been one of the worst for me, although it's beautiful. It's really at the end of the world and in my opinion, the dog keeping in many sectors here is inadequate. Right by the entrance of the village we saw a dog, whose chain was fastened to the belly, very tight. The dog couldn't really move and had pain. We removed the chain from the belly and put it around the neck again, where it doesn't belong, but the chain keeping is mandatory in Greenland. And we won't be capable to change that. I have to accept that here, as in every country, I can only move forward with small steps, but they are great steps for the dogs. Water, more food, kennels ... more control, more clearing up. The dog was glad that he was free from the chain around his belly ...

We continued our walk ... lots of garbage everywhere ... and I knew somewhere, quite back in the village ... there is a small river and there live chained dogs under extreme conditions. Egon and Levi walked with me. Egon said: No, there would probably be no more dogs. But I didn't let myself be confused... and found them. Under conditions that I couldn't imagine in my worst nightmares. There was almost nothing to see from the river, instead there was only garbage. And amidst the garbage we saw chained dogs. The chain of one dog was so short that he could no longer move. He was sitting on old electrical appliances, tins, shreds, shards ... my heart stood still... I beseeched a way ... and released him, even at the risk that he

could be shot... This could happen to free-flowing dogs, but everything was better than that. I waded through the garbage and my horror rose from minute to minute.

Because ... everywhere around there was free land, the dogs could also be held there. I was very angry. I have learned to be patient, but here my patience was over. Egon asked for the dog owners name, so I could report this case and that's what I did. The competent authority is located in Tasiilaq and they informed the dog owner. If he wouldn't place the dogs somewhere else, they would be shot. I felt guilty, because then I would be responsible for the death of the dogs. But when I was already back in Austria I asked Efraim and he told me that the dogs were now in a different place. I was relieved. And it had to be noted for the future, that especially in the villages there's a need for more help.

I had to learn that everything is different in Greenland. And the fact that hunting is still considered different from our debates. That hunt takes a different place here than with us. That seals and also whales serve as dog food. And when the whaling is successful, the people will celebrate a feast, it means food and coming together. This is also the case in Sermiligaaq, where I sat at the port and saw the small boats coming in, loaded with sacks full of bloody whale meat. And the heads with the long tooth ... Narwhale. Yes, Narwhales were hunted and the little village was on its feet. The meat was labored on land; it might be the biggest event for the next few weeks. For me as an animal rights activist and a vegan that was a scenario I followed with mixed feelings. But I understand that the hunting here has another status. And that the animals also have a chance. ...because it has nothing to do with the so called modern hunting in Europe. There is no hobby hunting; the focus is still on food procurement. Of course the huntsmen enjoy it, that is uninhibited. But also the dogs are provided with it. Of course you can say, ok, then it's better to provide no dogs and to use motor sleds. But they are expensive and not exactly environmentally friendly. We will never change everything in this world so that it fits for all of us. We must always have to accept a compromise and things that may not please us. But whatever is changeable, should or has to be changed. Like the pain of the sledge dogs in East Greenland. Robin Hood has already made a significant contribution to making them feel better. The situation in the villages is still a problem and I will try to do more in the field of medical care. And also the water supply should be improved. New dog food has been ordered in Denmark by Lars Anker, Robin Hood pays the

admittedly very expensive freight costs. But many dogs benefit from this because the food gets cheaper and the dog owners buy it when they have neither seals nor fish.

A further goal of mine is a stronger inclusion of the youth. Perhaps next year we will be able to perform a concert on site which runs under the name of animal and environmental protection.

In these two weeks we have seen a lot again. Levi as a veterinarian was a great help for the animals. I could see how the acceptance has grown. I am no longer an enemy who wants to ban the Inuit from hunting, as other organizations have tried before. I have my point of view, but I also accept the life of the Inuit. But the animals and the dogs I can help have got the first priority. Many leave East Greenland, looking for their happiness somewhere else, because there are hardly any prospects. Everyone hopes for tourism, and unfortunately already big cruise ships find their way to Greenland. But as everywhere they don't bring the big money, but only a lot of tourists who stay for a few hours and run off again. That's why it would be important to focus on sustainable tourism. Small private houses for rent, dog sled tours, hikes, all that already happens, but here there's also a trend towards fast tourism. The airport in Kulusuk was frequented by only a handful of people, and now there are so many passengers that you can no longer move. Chinese tourists with facial masks, day trip tourists, all are passed through. I think this is very sad. East Greenland is a jewel in the landscape. This must be preserved with sustainable tourism from which all can benefit. Finally the dogs; they could then be moved more and would be freed from the chain more often..

The two weeks passed much too fast. Many new people I've met, I've had many conversations. I've realized, we are no longer seen as enemies but as welcome helpers.

There is still much to be done, in this country at the end of the world. With its beauty, with its social problems. With its people, who simply live differently from us, whose way of living we respect. But which we would like to support, so that also the dogs are better.

And these dogs are fascinating. Whoever doesn't know them will hardly believe me, but these dogs are incomparable with others. All creatures deserve to help them. But just these dogs in particular.

Conclusion: These two weeks were successful. Many things already work, but we have to focus more on the villages.

Dog inspector Efraims boss plans for the future, to drive from time to time to the villages to control them.

Robin Hood will continue to pay for the transport of feed, 30 pallets, 21600 kg have already been ordered.

The water supply remains an issue, because here we are not completely satisfied.

The dog hut building also continues.

Our support program for all dog owners continues.

Our next goal: to ensure the necessary medical care in cooperation with the Veterinary Authority in Greenland.

East Greenland will probably never let us go. But in 2007 I would not have dared to dream what has been achieved so far.

But I couldn't manage this alone. It has been achieved by all of you, who support this unique project.

So please don't stop to take care for the sledge dogs in Greenland. They need you.

Thank you.

Marion Löcker

Robin Hood