

Winter in East Greenland

At the end of March, beginning of April I traveled to Greenland for the 11th time, for the 10th time I've been in East Greenland.

I already know a lot of people there, houses, all shops (there are not many of them), every bend and - the dogs.

Unfortunately, I cannot find those from the previous year. Not all of them.

The mortality is high. Or rather the death rate. The dogs are shot for the lack of medical care.

In 2017, Robin Hood brought a veterinarian on site, the authorities were informed and said it would be alright. Even legal drugs found the official way. But this year, the drugs had unfortunately been sent to the West Coast ... you are not allowed to use them. Eye ointments, medicaments for puppy deworming? I was angry. One thing is clear, medical care is the next barrier to be taken. I will again tell the authorities that they have to provide veterinary assistance. After all, there is an animal protection law in Greenland itself. I will offer the help of Robin Hood.

2 meters of fresh snow awaited us. This time Günter came with me, an "old" friend and a professional photographer. Powder snow at its best and the sun was shining from the bright blue sky.

But the snow caused us difficulties ... getting to the dogs alone was hard work ... we sank down to the hips ... and what would be only a short distance in summer made us sweat.

In winter, the dogs look better. Thick fur, they can move with the sleds and they obviously enjoy it. More and more dogs are used for tourists and the dog owners are showing more effort than before.

The dog food, which is imported from Denmark by Lars Anker and especially made for the claims of the sled dogs, is obviously good for them. And more and more Inuit buy it because Robin Hood pays the freight costs, about 16 000 € twice a year. This makes the food affordable. Also the dog owners from the remote villages come by boat to pick up the food. Of course, this is only possible between June and November.

Every residence brings something new. New people, new perspectives. This time I got to know Max, a Frenchman who has been living in East Greenland for a long time. Interesting, a man who cares about the fate of dogs.

Dogs being shot, dogs nobody wants. We want to work together. Max can drive to the villages and talk to the people. A link between the dog owners and Robin Hood. Very good, Max is a teacher. Thus, we can finally reach the children. I also meet Julius, a Greenlander

who loves his dogs. I could see him even hugging them. Maybe, there`s a turning point? Many tell us again and again that a lot has changed, since Robin Hood arrived. Not only, because we bring water, kennels and food, but we may also have paved the way for a relationship between humans and animals. But we are still far from the goal. Especially in the villages, catastrophes still happen. And summer is approaching. The worst time for the dogs. But for us in winter everything is a bit exhausting and the days pass quickly. We see the traditional sled dog races, at a small scale, but the people as well as the animals participate with enthusiasm.

But also the dark sides are visible. The chains, the kennels that are buried in the snow and cannot protect anyone. We saw puppies squatting on the ice, trembling. The mother tried to warm them. Unbelievable what these little creatures can tolerate.

Again and again dog owners ask me, I should help the dogs who are sick or injured. I would like to do that, but how? The medications are gone. The authorities on the west coast remain silent. I tell the dog owners, we have to act together and if it`s necessary, we can start a petition. We have to exert pressure together, because the dogs in East Greenland also deserve medical help.

The water pipe is now finally expanded, with a counter. We've been talking about this for some time, but clocks in East Greenland run much slower than elsewhere. Again and again I have to push, remember ... Torben from Kulusuk airport promises me again water containers for June or July. We already know each other for several years.

As always it is a small homecoming for me. Although I am still overwhelmed by facts that I simply can`t accept. Dogs that are no longer needed because the owner relocates are shot dead. A dog jumps up at me, gives kisses and is happy. Also this female dog shall be shot. Not far from her a black and white beauty in the snow. He too is consecrated to death.

I cannot believe it. I talked to the owner, a Dane. Later I wrote to him again and again. He gave in slowly and understood me and my plans ... but at the moment I don`t know if the dogs are still alive and if my ideas and my requests have been heard.

I always loose a piece of my heart when I see that healthy dogs have to die and maybe I cannot save them. Greenland can be a nerve-wracking experience and every time I am here I reach my limits. Although I have already achieved so many things, but there are problems that still make me speechless and sometimes powerless.

But with every visit, with every conversation I reach more, that is what I can feel.

I am worried about the awaited costs. For the expansion of the water system, the shipping of the food, the costs for Max, who will drive to the far-away villages ... and maybe we can save the pack of dogs, then I have to rent a place and I need someone to look after them. We also want to rescue dogs that have been torn from the chains and are actually shot dead. It all costs a lot of money and requires careful planning.

During this stay we did a sled dog tour with Egon and I could see how much the dogs enjoy the running. 14 dogs in a team ... unbelievable how fast they are. Egon says he wants to give me a dog in the summer. Taking a dog with me will be difficult. He would have to be taken to the West Coast to be vaccinated, chipped ... actually almost impossible. But who knows what the future will bring. Maybe in the future we will be able to gain more foothold in Greenland, with a small branch office. With employees like Max.

I see that the work with sled dogs, with so much snow in the winter, is hard work. The dogs must be partially carried through the deep snow to bring them back to their places. Food and water, everything is hard to carry in the snow. And I learn that some sled dog handlers also give the dogs water in the winter. That's good, because the dogs cannot eat as much snow as their organism needs. Unfortunately, not everyone does it that way, not yet.

Tourists stuck in a remote place, they were traveling by dog sled and then the snow came. Too deep for the dogs. With snowmobiles a way is made so it's possible for the dogs to make the way back. The booked return flights have flown off, in Greenland you have to be prepared for everything.

In the sun, the snow sparkles, the colorful houses shade night blue. An idyll? Climate change is also noticeable in Greenland, although you don't feel it at the moment. China wants to get the mineral resources ... all that is scary. How long will the jewel of East Greenland exist? Only gentle tourism, sustainability and the love of nature can preserve it.

I want to do my part. Save the dogs, enable them to live a life in dignity. That must be our goal.

As mentioned, the winter season is less terrible than the summer. When the dogs again have to expect thirst, dryness and a motionless life in chains. That means that the beautiful pictures from the winter will then be forgotten. Maybe I'll make it to Greenland again in this summer, it would be vitally necessary to realize all the plans. Unfortunately, it's also a question of money ... But we must not leave the sled dogs in the lurch. They deserve our help.

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Animal protection organization Robin Hood

May 3, 2018