



World's Leading Polar
Expedition Operator

Polar Bear Special

19th August – 26th August, 2012

On board the *M/V Plancius*



MV Plancius is named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). *Plancius* was built in 1976 as an oceanographic research vessel for the Royal Dutch Navy and was named *Hr. Ms. Tydeman*. The ship sailed for the Royal Dutch Navy until June 2004 when she was purchased by Oceanwide Expeditions and completely refitted in 2007, being converted into a 114-passenger expedition vessel. *Plancius* is 89m (267 feet) long, 14.5m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5m, with an Ice Strength rating of 1D, top speed of 12 knots and three diesel engines generating 1230hp each.

Captain Evgeny Levakov

his international crew of 35

and

Expedition Leader – Delphine Aurès (France)

Assistant Expedition Leader – Jim Mayer (Britain)

Guide & Lecturer – Christophe Gouraud (France)

Guide & Lecturer Mick Brown (Ireland)

Guide & Lecturer – Marion van Rijssel (The Netherlands)

Guide & Lecturer – Christian Alder (Germany)

Guide & Lecturer – Kelvin Murray (Scotland)

Guide & Lecturer – Thea Bechshoft (Denmark)

with

Hotel Manager – Marck Warmenhoven (The Netherlands)

Chief Steward – Rebeca Radu (Romania)

Head Chef – Ralf Barthel (Germany)

Assistant Chef – Mathias Schmitt (Germany)

Ship's Physician – Guy Raven (The Netherlands)

Day 1 - 19th August 2012

Embarkation: Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen

GPS 16.00 Position: 78° 13.9'N, 015° 38.7'E

Weather: Wind WSW 5, cloudy, +4°C.

Our adventure began as we climbed up the gangway from the pier in Longyearbyen. We embarked on *M/V Plancius*, our comfortable floating home for the next seven days.



Since Longyearbyen's foundation as a coal mining settlement in 1906 by John Munro Longyear, it has been the start point for many historic and pioneering expeditions. With all guests and their baggage safely on board, we departed at 17.15. As we cruised into the Isfjord we spotted several fulmars, black guillemots an Arctic skua and even our first Atlantic puffin! A Ringed seal appeared along side the ship shortly before we left the dock.

We gathered together in the lounge for briefings and introductions. The lifeboat drill provided an opportunity for dressing up and getting to know each other as we huddled together like orange-breasted sea birds on the deck, peering into lifeboats.

The evening continued in safety with champagne and high hopes for a successful voyage. Expedition Leader Delphine Aurès proposed a toast to our expedition aboard *Plancius*.

The wind speed increased as we headed out into open water and by 22.00 most

folks were in bed, which is the best place to be should there be any motion sickness.

Das Abenteuer Arktis beginnt! Einschiffung in Longyearbyen am Nachmittag, Abfahrt um 17.30 Uhr. Wir fahren durch den Eisfjord und konnten bereits hier eine Reihe verschiedener arktischer Seevoegel beobachten, darunter Eissturmvogel, Skua, Lummern und Papageientaucher. Wir versammelten uns in der Lounge zu einer generellen Einfuehrung in die Gepflogenheiten an Bord sowie zu Sicherheits- und Notfallmassnahmen. Es folgte eine Uebung mit Schwimmwesten an den Rettungsbooten.

Am Abend lud die Expeditionsleiterin Delphine Aurès zu einem Glas Chamgagner ein und stiess mit uns auf den Erfolg der Expedition mit der *Plancius* an.

Der Wind frischte beträchtlich auf, als wir das offene Meer erreichten. Die meisten Gaeste legten sich daher bereits um 22 Uhr schlafen, nicht zuletzt zur Vermeidung von Seekrankheit.

Day 2 – 20th August 2012

Andøyanen and Monacobreen, Liefdefjorden

0800 Position: 79°38.8'N, 010°11.8'E

Weather: Partly cloudy, scattered snow showers later, 5°C

During the night *M/V Plancius* continued to sail north and in the morning passed the northwest corner of Spitsbergen. After breakfast we began to prepare for our expedition activities with a series of presentations on helping to preserve the natural and cultural history of Svalbard, zodiac operations and safety procedures regarding Polar bears. Just before lunch our Polar bear specialist Thea gave an insightful introduction to these magnificent Arctic predators.

After lunch we arrived at Andøyane in blustery conditions. Scanning the shore, the team on the Bridge spotted a number of bears and great excitement went around the ship. Our zodiacs were launched and soon our intrepid guests were getting a taste of Arctic weather and sea conditions! The first bear appeared to leave in a hurry when we were still far out, suggesting it had spotted something tasty, and we observed it enter the water.



We do not approach swimming bears as this can be stressful for them. Therefore our attention turned to another bear spotted further down the coast. To our delight, we realised that this bear was actually a female with a single cub, the young bear taking shelter from the wind behind its mother. Upon returning to the ship for a well-deserved hot drink, we spotted the first bear – a young male in good condition – patrolling the shore of an island ahead of our anchorage. We had a good view of this bear as he slowly continued his lonely wanderings.



The ship then repositioned and we made a slow and careful cruise of Monacobreen – a large and very scenic glacier spilling into the fjord. This glacier is in retreat, as are many on Svalbard. As a result our ship sailed into waters where very little chart information exists, as this part of the fjord was once under the glacier! Snow dusted the surrounding mountains and blue sky peeked

through the clouds as many of us enjoyed the scenery from deck.

During dinner the ship began to move north through Woodfjorden, passing the 'The Ritter's Hut' near Gråhuken, where Christiane Ritter over-wintered with her trapper husband Herman and a Norwegian called Karl Nikolaisen in 1934-5. Ritter wrote of her experiences in "A Woman In The Polar Night." The ship kept a steady course northwards – destination pack ice and more Polar bears...



Waehrend der Nacht setzte die *Plancius* ihre Fahrt nach Norden fort und erreichte am Morgen die Nordwestspitze Spitzbergens. Nach dem Fruehstueck folgten Einfuehrungen zum Verhalten beim Kontakt mit Eisbaeren und ein Vortrag von Thea ueber diese eindrucksvollen Tiere.

In Andoyane entdeckte die Bruecke mehrere Eisbaeren. Die Schlauchboote wurden zu Wasser gelassen. Bei maessig gutem Wetter, Wind und Seegang erreichten wir die Kueste und sahen den ersten Baeren im Wasser schwimmend, kurz darauf eine Baerin mit einem Jungen an Land. Vom Schiff aus konnten wir etwas spaeter einen gut genaehrten maennlichen Baeren beobachten.

Das Schiff lichtete wieder den Anker und fuhr zum Monaco-Gletscher, der sehr eindrucksvoll mit einer ca 35 m hohen Gletscherkante zum Meer abbricht. Wie viele Gletscher Svalbards ist auch dieser Gletscher im Rueckzug begriffen.

Die *Plancius* setzte ihre Fahrt durch den Woodfjord fort und passierte in der Naehe von Gråhuken die Huette, in der Christiane Ritter (Autorin des bekannten Buchs „Eine Frau erlebt die Polarnacht“) 1934/35 mit einem Trapper ueberwinterte.

Day 3 – 21th August 2012

Pack-ice up to 81°28.226' N, the northernmost position of our journey!!!

08.00 GPS position: 81°01.1' N / 020°07.3' E

Weather: Overcast with snow, 1°C



Wake-up call was at 07.45hrs this morning as the *Plancius* was arriving in the pack-ice at 81° N. The pack-ice, eternal and mystic landscape of the High Arctic but also, and not the less, the natural habitat of the top predator of those latitudes: the Polar bear. After a good breakfast we were ready either on the bridge or on the outer decks with binoculars and cameras to search for THE beast. At 10.34hrs came through the PA that the first Polar bear has been spotted: an adult male, a little bit "skinny" but still in good condition. Here the day had started and as we are used to say, a picture is worth a thousand words...



A : 10.34hrs, adult male. **B** : 13.01hrs, happy adult female. **C** : 12.04hrs, big adult male. **D** : 15.55hrs, sleepy adult male. **E** : 18.31hrs, adult male...cherry on the cake, a Pomarine skua flying around !

Wir erreichten am 81. Breitengrad das Packeis und damit das primäre Habitat des Königs der Arktis, des Eisbaeren. Zugleich erreichten wir heute auch den nördlichsten Punkt der Reise. Der Tag wurde zum besonderen Erlebnis insbesondere für die Fotografen. Wir sahen mehrere Eisbaeren, gutenteils aus grosser Nähe. Die Bilder sprechen für sich.

Day 4 – 22th August 2012

Karl XII Øya and Albertinbukta

08.00 GPS position: 80°43.0' N / 024°06.6' E

Weather: Overcast, 1°C (with an occasional glimpse of sun :)

After a long and exciting day of spotting polar bears, *Plancius* again headed south. The pack ice and wind conditions had been in our favour during the night, and we arrived at the remote Karl XII Øya hours before expected. No time wasted, the first Zodiac was in the water at 9:45.

On the island, we observed seven polar bears; some younger, some older – but all on the lookout for food to sustain them until the return of the ice. One bear tried its luck high up on the bird cliffs, while others chose instead to relax and preserve their energy. A good number of different bird species were found on and around the island ; Kittiwake, Black guillemot, Glaucous gull, Pomarine skua, Arctic skua, and even Eider duck with ducklings.

Swimming in the water around KarlXII Øya were more than 100 walrus, mainly mothers with calves. Curious, but cautious, the animals kept at a distance. On a side note, one Zodiac observed a dead walrus in the water close to the island – surely a feast for the bears when it drifts onto the shore !



After a nice lunch and perhaps even a tiny nap for the lucky ones, we sailed further south and headed for Albertinibukta. In the end of this bay lies Schweigaardbreen, one of the many glaciers stemming from the Austfonna icesheet that covers almost all of the eastern part of Nordaustlandet. Here, we went on a beautiful Zodiac drive between old and newer icebergs of amazing colors – everything from baby blue to grey to white – and even sailed along the glacier front, accompanied by the crackling sound of age-old air bubbles trapped in the ice being released again as it was melting. Along the glacier, among the newly broken off ice, we saw Northern fulmar, Arctic skua, Black guillemot, and Ivory gull.

Yet another lovely day with not only more bears, but also the walrus as a brand new species to add to the list of wildlife we have seen so far on our expedition to the (very) High Arctic.



Nach einem spannenden Tag mit Baerenbeobachtungen im Packeis ging die *Plancius* wieder auf Kurs nach Sueden. Infolge guenstiger Windrichtung erreichten wir die entlegene Insel Karl XII Øya frueher als geplant. Die Schlauchboote wurden zu Wasser gebracht. Waehrend der Umrundung der Insel sahen wir sieben Eisbaeren und viele aus dem Wasser auftauchende Walrossgruppen.

Am Nachmittag fuehrte uns unsere Route in die Albertinibukta. Hier liessen wir uns auf einer Schlauchbootfahrt von den fantastischen Formen und Farben der Eisberge begeistern, die der Gletscher Schweigaardbreen an dieser Stelle ins Meer entlaesst.

Day 5 –23th August 2012

Duvefjorden

08:00 position: 80°23.0' N, 23°15.8' E

Weather: Winds WNW Force 2-3 , cloudy, +2°C

We woke up in the Duvefjorden with calm weather. A scouting party went out to Minebukta to find out if we could – for the first time – set foot ashore. During breakfast however, the winds became stronger and it started to snow lightly. The scouting group came back reporting no bear was to be seen at the landing site but the waters were quite choppy. It stopped snowing and Delphine decided to go ahead with the first landing. Due to the tricky sea conditions, it took some time before all of us were on land and in the right group, but then the hiking and photographing could begin.



We were on a typical Svalbard “elevated beach,” a succession of ridges of stones in many different colors, that had then been sorted by freezing and thawing into regular patterns. Mick and Jim started with the long walk, while Delphine, Thea and Christian took the medium-fast group, Christophe and Marion took off with the photographers, Kelvin led the leisure walk along the beach.

We marveled at the landscape and the small plants that were able to grow under these harsh conditions. On the way back most of the groups had a look at the dead Polar bear that Kelvin found near the landing site. It looked skinny but since it is not allowed to touch dead Polar bear we could not determine if the bear had been wounded or died from starvation. GPS coordinates of the carcass were reported to the Sysselmannen, the governor of Svalbard.



After the morning exercise we enjoyed our delayed lunch and Thea gave a lecture on Polar bear management. Mick and Christian resumed their lectures on birds and Arctic phenomenon that had been interrupted by bear sightings yesterday.

As these are poorly charted waters, we sailed slowly deeper into the Duvefjord. In the evening we dropped anchor and did another landing on the shore. This time Mick and Christophe lead a group of hikers for a longer walk while the others remained on the beach amongst moss in different shades of green. Also some flowers could be found, such as the Svalbard poppy, Moss Campion and Saxifrage species. Around the corner there was beautiful scenery with a Kittiwake colony in the distance.



Back on the ship it was time to BBQ on the aft deck of the ship. Good food, good company and good music marked the end of a good day!

Wir erwachten im Duvefjord. Die See war ruhig, der Himmel ueberzogen. Spaeter begann es leicht zu schneien. Auf den Bergen lag frischer Neuschnee. Zunaechst erkundeten einige Guides die Lage an Land. Nachdem kein Baer entdeckt wurde, war unser erster Landgang auf Svalbard moeglich. Eingeteilt in mehrere Gruppen wanderten wir ueber die Tundra, die in dieser hohen Breite nur noch eine karge Vegetation aufweist. Auf dem Rueckweg sahen wir nahe des Strand es einen toten Eisbaeren.

Nachmittags hielten Mick und Christian Vortraege ueber die arktische Vogelwelt und ueber Naturphaenomene in der Arktis.

Gegen 18 Uhr folgte eine weitere Anlandung tiefer im Duvefjord, gefolgt von einem kurzen Spaziergang. Anschliessend feierten wir die Reise bei einer Grillparty mit Musik auf dem Achterdeck. Einige der Gaeste waermten sich bei einem Taenzchen.

Day 6 - 24th August 2012

Phippsøya & Lågøya

08.00hrs GPS Position: 80°41.0'N 020°36.3'E

Weather: Winds East force 3 Cloudy, occasionally sunshine, +2°C

This morning's destination was the island of Phippsøya named after the British explorer Constantine Phipps and part of the archipelago known as the Sjuøyane (Norwegian for "Seven Islands"). The morning started with a scouting party going ashore, as usual, in order to scout the landing area before guests arrived. As much as we like to see Polar bears from the safety of the ship or zodiac, we would not like to have a close encounter with one on land, hence this normal precaution.

A bear was found on shore close to the intended landing site and so we moved from plan A to plan B and took a zodiac cruise instead. Rounding the southern tip of the island Kelvin led us to the spot where he had seen the bear; but none was to

be found! Then a little movement amongst the boulders close to the shore gave away her position. The young female bear was at the waters edge eating kelp. She climbed up onto a rock and for a time the tourists watched the bear, whilst the bear watched the tourists.



The cruise continued around to the north where we found a group of male walrus hauled out on the beach, slowly digesting their meals of clams. On the return journey we met more walrus swimming, some coming close to check out the zodiacs.

During the repositioning in the afternoon, guest lecturer Karl-Herman Kock spoke about whaling and Jim gave a talk on the trappers of Spitsbergen.

Our afternoon landing at Lågøya was also thwarted by a bear ashore, so we again took to the zodiacs and enjoyed the wildlife from the safety of a boat. In addition to walrus we were delighted with a sighting of an Arctic fox. In its brown summer coat the fox was busy amongst the tern nests' on the ground searching for food.

The younger generation enjoyed a bouncy, fast boat ride back to *Plancius*, their whoops of joy ringing out over the waves!

Just when we thought it was safe to go to bed, Kelvin announced the sighting of a Blue whale! This is the largest animal on the planet and real privilege to see. Captain Levakov carefully manoeuvred the ship for a good view and then after a while the whale continued on it's way and we on ours.

Das Ziel dieses Tages waren die Inseln Phippsøya und Lågøya. Ein Landgang auf Phippsøya war wegen eines Baeren in Strandnaehe nicht moeglich. Stattdessen unternahmen wir eine Bootstour, sahen den Baeren (ein Weibchen) und bald darauf mehrere kleine Herden im Wasser schwimmender Walrosse, von denen einige sehr nahe an die Boote kamen.

Waehrend das Schiff Lågøya ansteuerte, hielt Herr Dr. Kock einen Vortrag ueber Walfang und Walmanagement.

Die Situation in Lågøya war nicht viel anders: Auch hier durften wir wegen eines Baeren keinen Landgang riskieren. Dafuer konnten wir von den Booten aus Walrosskolonien an Land beobachten. Ploetzlich tauchte noch ein Polarfuchs auf, der sich von angreifenden Kuestenseeschwalben nicht besonders gestoert fuehlte.

Der spaetere Abend hielt noch ein weiteres Highlight bereit. Ein Blauwal tauchte einige Male in unmittelbarer Naeh der *Plancius* auf.

Day 7 - 25th August 2012

Ytre Norskøya

08.00hrs GPS Position: 79°51.2'N 011°32.4'E

Weather: Winds variable force 2, bright sunshine, +4°C

A super sunny day on which to conclude our cruise! In a huge contrast to our first outing (remember the zodiacs in the wind and rain at Leifdefjord!?) we embarked for a pleasant shuttle to shore. Our landing this morning was right in the heart of the 17th century whaling area. Ytre Norskøya is the location of around 160 whalers graves: it is the largest cemetery on Spitsbergen. Along the shore line are several blubber ovens. Now indistinct and broken down, this is where the pieces of whale would be rendered for oil.



We split into several groups, two of which made the march to higher ground and enjoyed great views over the fjords, ice and cliffs in all directions. We found several puffin nesting sites on cliffs below us. The walks on lower ground took in a view of

the grave sites and found some young Arctic terns, unusually happy to have us approach!



Soon it was time to return to *Plancius* as we still had some distance to sail to Longyearbyen. Passing through Fairhaven, Barent's first anchorage in Spitsbergen (1596) we also had a view of Amsterdam island, home to the largest Dutch whaling settlement, Smeerenburg.

During the afternoon we were entertained by a series of lectures including whales, plate tectonics, marine ecology and the conquest of the North Pole.

Two 'end of cruise ceremonies' then took place: Returning of rubber boots, and the Captain's farewell. The later including the results of our photo competition and distribution of expedition logs and certificates to all.

It was only a short voyage to Isfjord and Longyearbyen, and a short night's sleep for many as friendships formed on the voyage were celebrated into the small hours!

Der Morgen ueberraschte uns mit blauem Himmel und einer fantastischen Sicht auf die schneueberzuckerten Berge NW-Spitzbergens. Unsere Anlandung auf der Insel Ytre Norskøya fuehrte gewissermassen ins Zentrum des Walfangs waehrend des 17. Jahrhunderts. Man sieht hier noch die Relikte frueherer Speckoefen, ferner ca. 160 Graeber von Walfaengern. Aufgeteilt in mehrere Gruppen erklimm ein Teil der Passagiere den hoechsten Punkt der Insel mit einer grandiosen Aussicht nach allen Richtungen. Sie beobachteten auch Papageientaucher. Die anderen folgten der Kueste, sahen eine hier reichhaltigere Flora, unter anderem auch Pilze (Boviste), ferner bodenbruetende Kuestenseeschwalben und deren Kueken.

Am Nachmittag liefen mehrere Referate zu den Themen marine Oekologie und Plattentektonik, ueber Wale und die Eroberung des Nordpols.

Am Abend verabschiedeten sich der Kapitaen und sein Team. Wir lernten die Ergebnisse des Fotowettbewerbs kennen, alle Gaeste erhielten eine Zusammenfassung der Reise und ihre Zertifikate als Polarfahrer.

On this voyage:

**the Galley team have cracked over 1,500 eggs,
we have seen 18 Polar bears,
the engineers have made 168 tonnes of fresh water,
you have taken as many photos as there are hairs on a bear,
and we have sailed 970 nautical miles!**

* * *

**Captain Levakov, Expedition Leader Delphine and the
whole expedition team thank you for sailing with us and
wish you bon voyage!**

