

University of Groningen



**SYSSELMESTEREN  
PÅ SVALBARD**

Att.: Jouke Prop

Our date:  
09.07.2021

Our reference  
17/00491-12

Your date:  
12.05.2021

## **Reply to research application – barnacle goose - Nordenskiöldkysten - University of Groningen - RiS-ID 3533**

We refer to your research application dated 12.05.2021. The University of Groningen with project leader Jouke Prop asks for permission to conduct fieldwork on barnacle goose at the Nordenskiöld coast inside Van Mijenfjorden national park in the period 05.07.-30.07.2021.

### **Project and fieldwork description**

*The local barnacle goose population on Nordenskiöldkysten, Svalbard, is the subject of a population study. We study the response of the geese to insistent and severe predation of eggs by polar bears. We study effects of changes in plant phenology and tundra hydrology on goose performance.*

*The main goal for the 2021 season is to mark barnacle geese. We planned the catching for 2020 (as approved by the Governor of Svalbard) but did not manage this as we were too late due to covid-19 travel restrictions. Also for 2021 we have to skip part of the project due to the covid-19 situation.*

*Our work builds on a long history of goose population data collected in this particular area. At the time we started the study (1977) this was the single best location for investigating goose populations*

### **Fauna:**

*We catch and mark barnacle geese only once in five years. The last time of catching was in 2015. We do this by herding moulting (flightless) geese into a corral. The corral is made of a polyester sheet such that the geese have no view around. This keeps them calm, and geese stand (or sit) side by side. If goslings are among the geese, they are first separated from the group and transferred to small tents (type: Nomad baby tents). These small tents are erected immediately adjacent to the corral. Subsequently, adults are brought to small tents as well (maximal 15 individuals per tent). Geese are taken from the tents one by one. One observer deploys the rings (one metal on one leg, a plastic ring (3 cm tall) on the other). Subsequently, body measures are taken by calipers and ruler: head size as the skull plus bill length, wing length by measuring the ninth primary (this is the measure for progress of moult), leg size as the total tarsus length. Body mass is taken by placing the goose on an electronic balance, and sex is established by cloacal inspection. After processing, the*

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goose is returned to the corral. All geese are released simultaneously to the lake where they were caught. On top of standard hygiene measures (washing hands as often as possible), gloves and masks are used to avoid transmission of diseases. We obtained permission from Mattilsynet (Animal Welfare) and Stavanger Museum (ringing license). We apply for catching (and marking) 627 barnacle geese in the area between Bellsund and Gravsjøen. This number will be sufficient to support the work on Nordenskiöldkysten and in the staging areas (Helgeland and Vesterålen) as well.

### Camp

We plan to have a camp for the duration of the field period. This is five small tents for the whole period. We will comply to the regulations as set by the Governor of Svalbard. Tents will be placed on unvegetated spots, far from any cultural heritage sites. Any garbage will be collected and returned to Longyearbyen. Besides regular safety measures concerning polar bears (such as checking the environment frequently) we protect the camp by an electric fence. Any observation hides that we use will be protected by an electric fence as well.

### **Regulations**

The fieldwork will take place inside the Nordenskiöld Land National Park, which is protected by regulations on the preservation of Van Mijenfjorden national park (FOR-2021-06-18-1980). The purpose of Van Mijen national park is to preserve a magnificent, cohesive and essentially untouched arctic valley, fjord and coastal landscape with intact habitats, ecosystems, species, natural ecological processes, landscapes, cultural heritage, as an area for research and for experiencing Svalbard's natural and cultural heritage.

According to this regulation section 10, the Governor is given authority to grant exemptions from the provisions after Svalbard Environmental Protection Act section 22.

Section 22 states:

*When scientific or other special reasons so indicate, the environmental protection authorities may grant exemptions from a protection decision provided that this does not conflict with the objectives of the protection decision and will not have a significant impact on the conservation value of the area.*

*In an exemption granted under the first paragraph, the grounds for the decision shall include an account of how the environmental protection authorities have evaluated the impact that the exemption may have on the environment and the weight that has been attached to this.*

Camping is regulated in regulations on camp stays on Svalbard (FOR-2002-06-27-731). According to the regulations regarding camp stays on Svalbard section 4, camp stays at the same location for one week or more requires a notification to the Governor.

### **The Governor's considerations**

According to section 22, the Governor may grant exemptions for scientific purposes as long as this is not in conflict with the purpose of the protection. This does not necessarily mean that exemption is given. Generally, fieldwork should be carried out outside protected areas. In this particular case, the Governor must consider if the activity is in conflict with the purpose of Van Mijenfjorden national park.



The barnacle goose is classified as viable (LC) on the Norwegian Red List for Species. Capturing and handling birds is regarded as a disturbance. The fieldwork includes catching of maximum 627 individuals of barnacle goose. The studied birds in this scientific project will only be a small part of the local population breeding in the area. Performed correctly, with short handling time, the Governor consider the disturbance to be minimal.

The Governor has placed emphasis on the fact that the purpose of the fieldwork is scientific, and that the applicant has experience in such fieldwork from several previous studies in the same area since 1977. The results from the fieldwork on barnacle geese may be of importance for the management authorities.

By following the conditions set to the permission, the Governor consider that the fieldwork will not affect the conservation value of the area and is not in conflict with the purpose of the protection decision.

The applicator plans for camping for the duration of the field period 05.-30.07. The camp consists of five small tents, which will be placed on unvegetated spots, away from culture heritage sites. Garbage will be collected and returned to Longyearbyen. The camp will be protected by an electric fence. The Governor consider the camp plan as adequate. Please notice the regulations relating to camping activities in Svalbard

### **The Governor's decision**

The Governor of Svalbard grants the University of Groningen att. Jouke Prop permission to capture, mark and measure maximum 627 barnacle geese on Nordensköldkysten in the period 05.07.-30.07.2021 as described in the application.

The permit is given under the provision of the Svalbard Environmental protection Act section 22.

### The Governor's permission is granted on the following conditions:

- Procedures for preventing transmission of any disease shall be followed.
- The fieldwork shall not cause unnecessary stress and strain on the birds.
- The project leader shall provide for immediate reporting of possible accidents/irregularities to the Governor.
- All equipment and all waste items are to be removed and brought back. Garbage shall not be burned, except clean untreated wood.
- These exemptions are only valid for the people included in the project.
- This permit must be brought along during the fieldwork.
- The project shall submit a yearly report from the fieldwork in the RiS database by November 1st, 2021.

### **Duty of care**

The Governor calls attention to the duty of care in the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act § 5 first sentence, «Any person who is staying in or operates an undertaking in Svalbard shall show due consideration and exercise the caution required to avoid unnecessary damage or disturbance to the natural environment or cultural heritage. » The Governor requests particular attention regarding wildlife.

**Right to complain**

According to Norwegian law you are entitled to complain about the present decision. Written complaints must be submitted within three weeks of receiving this letter. The complaint must be submitted to the Governor.

Regards

Ingvild Øyjordet  
Acting Head of Environment Protection

*This document is approved and expedited electronically without signature*

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Miljødirektoratet