



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

Around Spitsbergen

12th – 21st July 2013

aboard the

M.V. Plancius



M.V. *Plancius* was named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). She 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; she was completely refitted in 2007. Now converted into a 114-passenger expedition vessel, *Plancius* is 89 metres (267 feet) long, 14.5 m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5 m. She has an ice class rating of 1D, three diesel engines generating 1230 hp each and a top speed of 12+ knots.

With

Captain Alexey Nazarov
and his international crew of 45

plus

Hotel Manager – Mark Warmenhoven (The Netherlands)

Assistant Hotel Manager – Katerina Zavazalova (Czech/New Zealand)

Head Chef – Ralf Barthel (Germany/New Zealand)

Sous Chef – Mathias Schmitt (Germany)

Ship's Physician – Edwin van Leeuwen (The Netherlands)

and

Expedition Leader – Delphine Aurès (France)

Assistant Expedition Leader – Gérard Bodineau (France)

Guide/Lecturer – Sandra Petrowitz (Germany)

Guide/Lecturer – Bob Brown (Northern Ireland, U.K.)

Guide/Lecturer – Louis Beyens (Belgium)

Guide/Lecturer – Michelle van Dijk (The Netherlands)

Guide/Lecturer – Arjen Drost (The Netherlands)

Guide/Lecturer – Simon Cook (Wales, UK)

Welcome you all on board *Plancius!*

Day 1 – Friday 12th July 2013

Embarkation in Longyearbyen

16.00: GPS Position: 78° 14' N, 15° 37' E



01Evening: wind from NW, Beaufort 3; sky overcast; 9° C.

The big day was finally here! A few of us were already in Longyearbyen, having arrived a day or two previously. Those of us who arrived on the afternoon plane had a short time in town before being brought to the dock. Our adventure was about to start, because Plancius was not at the dock but out at anchor! Zodiacs and staff were waiting for us so it wasn't long before both we and our luggage was safely aboard our home for the next few days. Mark and Katerina welcomed us at reception where we were assigned our cabins. Friendly hotel staff showed us to our berths before we explored, getting familiar with the layout of the ship.



We soon gathered in the lounge for a welcome briefing from Mark and Delphine before the ship departed from Longyearbyen. Soon thereafter we again gathered in the lounge to attend a compulsory safety briefing and drill. Later on Captain Alexey formally welcomed us aboard the ship and we raised a glass to

propose the success of the voyage. Delphine then introduced her team, many of whom we had already met ashore or in the boats! After dinner there was great excitement when Simon announced that humpback whales had been seen. Although more were seen later the first ones were the best. The captain did an expert job of positioning the ship close to but behind the animals and we had fantastic views as they surfaced, spouted and showed their tail flukes when they dived. What a start to the trip!



Day 2 – Saturday 13th July

14th of July Bay and Ny Ålesund



01Morning : wind variable even null; clear sky; 9° C.
Mid-day : wind from NNW, Beaufort 2; clear sky; 14° C.
Evening : wind from NE, Beaufort 2; clear sky; 10° C.

14th of July glacier.

08.00: GPS Position: 79° 06' N, 11° 37' E

Our first excursion day began with some information given by Delphine on polar bear safety. Around 10.30 we began our zodiac cruise in Krossfjorden near the 14th of July glacier. This name was given by Duke Albert I of Monaco to honour the French National Day, this was 1906 or 1907. The steep cliffs near the glacier teem with birdlife: small colonies of the Brunnich's guillemots, puffins and kittiwakes testimony of the richness in food of this area in.



These seabirds are a real link between the marine and terrestrial ecosystems, bringing nutrients from the sea into the tundra-environment. Some sea-mammals we observed were the harbour seal, and several bearded seals. Some barnacle geese and pink-footed geese could be seen, together with some reindeer. On a standing alone big rock, two young glaucous gulls waited for more food.

Ny-Ålesund

15.00: GPS Position: 78° 55' N, 11° 55' E

In the afternoon we visited the former mine village Ny-Ålesund. The Norwegian Kings Bay Coal Company began here in 1916 with the exploitation of the coal seams. This activity stopped in 1962 after a series of dramatic and fatal mine accidents. Now it is an international scientific centre, but it also has historical significance in that several attempts to fly over the North Pole started here in Ny-Ålesund. A conspicuous reminder of that period is the airship mast, used by Amundsen, Ellsworth and Nobile to moor the Norge in 1926. In the village arctic terns breed and defend their territory against intruders, including humans. Snow buntings are easily seen among the several buildings, even around the bust of Roald Amundsen, the famous Norwegian explorer. A big surprise was to find the nest of a Red Phalarope, with three eggs.

Blomstrandhalvøya



22.00: GPS Position: 79° 06' N, 10° 54' E

The nice weather meant that we could also achieve a landing and short walk on the south side of Blomstrandhalvøya. Halvøya means peninsula, but is now really an island. On older maps you can see that a glacier tongue is linking Blomstrandhalvøya with the northern shore of the fjord, but since this glacier retreated, Blomstrandhalvøya shows its true face: it is an island. This is also the only place where the long-tailed skua breeds in Svalbard, and already on

the landing site, they showed up, and we could admire from a very short distance.

The island is called after the Swedish chemist and geologist Christian Blomstrand, who travelled here in 1861. The name recalls flowers, and it is indeed an area full of flowering plants. Moss campion (*Silene acaulis*) with its nice pinkish flowers was easily spotted, and also nice populations of Mountain avens (*Dryas octopetala*). The White arctic bell-heather, *Cassiope tetragona*, with its bell shaped white flowers, is a plant which needs a sufficient snow cover to survive the winter.

Further on, we saw the driving power of frost working. The process of freezing and thawing of the active layer, which is the shallow layer of soil thawing each year, works the stones to the surface, which results in stone circles. The remnants of an enterprise to extract marble between 1910 and 1920 by the Northern Exploration Company are still present. However, the poor quality of the marble led to the abandonment of the site.

Day 3 – Sunday 14th July

Liefdefjord: Andøyane, Monaco glacier and Idabukta & Moffen



01Morning: wind NNE Beaufort 3; clear sky; 8° C.

Mid-day: wind from NNE, Beaufort 2; clear sky; 7° C.

Evening: wind from NNE, Beaufort 2; overcast; 7° C.

Andøyane.

08.00: GPS Position: 79° 45' N, 13° 56' E

All the early birds who were out already before breakfast could enjoy sailing through the sunshine and view over Reinsdyrflya while sailing through Woodfjord. Woodfjord cuts about 65 kilometres into the north coast and has two side branches, Bockfjord and Liefdefjord. Just at the entrance of Liefdefjord, which means fjord of love, lies Andøyane, our first goal for today. Andøyane means goose-islands and is so called because of its rich bird life. Ten Zodiacs were lowered and were divided into two groups. One group went around the islands clockwise and the other one counter



clockwise. Going around the island we did not only find king eider and long-tailed ducks, but also red-throated diver and great northern diver (2), red/grey phalarope, turnstone, arctic terns and even a flock of pink-footed geese that were attacked by two great skuas.

Everyone had a great time looking at these reddish islands in the very scenic background of Liefdefjord. This 'Old Red Sandstone' was created in the Devonian, 390 million years ago when Spitsbergen was situated at the equator. When everyone was back on board and the ship had lifted anchor, a polar bear decided to stand up and show itself. This illustrated how well polar bears can hide themselves if they don't want to be seen!

Liefdefjorden.

16.00: GPS Position: 79° 35' N, 12° 27' E

During lunch we sailed deeper into Liefdefjord to take a look at the beautiful and famous 5 kilometre wide glacier-front of the Monacobreen & Seligerbreen. This too was named after Duke Albert I of Monaco. After that we anchored in Idabukta, which is named after the wife of the German surveyor Paul Seliger. From here we split up into three walks, a long, a medium and a short one. The long one went up hill to look at the Ida glacier, the other two took some more time for looking at the flowers and geography.

Moffen.

23.00: GPS Position: 80° 00' N, 14° 29' E

On the way out of Woodfjorden, at around 22.30, we found ourselves in the vicinity of Moffen. This sandy and stony atoll-like island is a nature reserve where all traffic within 300 metres is banned between 15 May and 15 September. This does not count for walrus that frequently haul out on Moffen! This time we were lucky because in addition to lots of walrus there was also a polar bear, and two Sabine gulls to be seen.

Day 4 – Monday 15th July

Seven Islands (Sjuøyane), Ice navigation



0Morning: no wind; overcast, low visibility, some showers of light snow; 5° C.

Mid-day: no wind; fog; 3° C.

Evening: wind from NW, Beaufort 3; fog; temperature 3° C.

Seven Island.

08.00: GPS Position: 80° 40' N, 20° 46' E

The first look out of the window or porthole in the morning was surprising: winter had come to the Seven Islands overnight! A thin layer of fresh snow topped the mountains, and some more flakes were dancing from the sky. The captain found us a sheltered anchor site close to Phippsøya, and from there we set out in the zodiacs to



land on a sandy beach. In groups we went for a walk in a mid-July winter landscape, marvelling at the rapidly changing light conditions and the iceblink in the distance. Quite a few of us took the beachcombing seriously and collected plastic rubbish that had been littering the shore. As soon as we all were on board again, we weighed anchor and started heading about north-east towards the polar drift ice.



Pack ice, north of Spitsbergen.

17.00: GPS Position: 80° 50.066' N, 20° 43' E

Puffins came flying by and a lot of seals rested on the ice. It did not take too long before the first bear was spotted but the adult male seemed to be on a mission and did not particularly care for our being there. Some time later, in about 1.3 nm distance from the first bear, we saw a bear, again on the ice. We came to the conclusion that it had to be the same animal and now we could also clearly see what the 'King of the Arctic' was after: he sneaked up closer and closer towards a Bearded Seal that

rested near a breathing hole. We watched in awe from the ship and quite a distance so as not to disturb the hunt that was going on before our eyes. After an enormous amount of stalking, swimming from one ice floe to the next, and eventually diving under the ice, the bear suddenly emerged out of the breathing hole – only to find that the seal was gone. From our ship we had noticed this much earlier than the bear, but it made the behavioural study even more interesting because we were shown impressively how much effort it takes for a bear to find and get its prey.

During the afternoon we also reached our northernmost position on this voyage, well beyond 80 degrees: 80° 50.066' N. The captain manoeuvred Plancius through narrow channels between ice floes, gently pushing the ice aside, and it was as fascinating to watch the skilful sailing as it was to admire the beautiful nature around us, with ice extending to the horizon.

20.00: GPS Position: 80° 46' N, 19° 02' E

Day 5 – Tuesday 16th July

Sorgfjord & Alkefjellet, Hinlopen Strait



Morning: wind NW Beaufort 3; overcast; 8° C.

Mid-day: wind from NNE, Beaufort 2; fog; 7° C.

Evening: wind from NW, Beaufort 2; overcast; 5° C.

Sorgfjorden.

08.00: GPS Position: 79° 56' N, 16° 43' E

This morning was grey and damp but the weather didn't stop us from going out in the zodiacs after breakfast. Delphine had given us a 400-year history (including the world's most northerly sea battle, over whaling rights) in 10 minutes so we knew what to expect! The beach was all shingle so it was a very easy landing. We were split into two groups so that there was no clash of activities. As a result there were lots of choices for us to make and lots of things for us to see. The first five boats went to the shore where



three groups were formed. One group set off on a tundra hike, another went up the beach towards some walrus and the third headed towards the hill and the graves. The tundra was wide open and off in the distance there were a few reindeer, grazing on the plant life. Some of the flowers were left for us to look at too! On top of the hill were graves and a cross but the big attraction was waiting for us on the beach – walrus. Some of them were in the water too and we had the chance to watch these loveable animals from both the shore and the zodiacs. Big marine mammals were seen later too, when two humpback and a single fin whale were spotted. The fin soon disappeared but the humpies gave us close and prolonged views.

Alkefjellet.

20.00: GPS Position: 79° 36' N, 18° 30' E

We had a leisurely afternoon with Bob, who talked extensively about the life of seabirds. It was a great introduction to the stupendous bird cliffs that we visited after dinner. Several boats set off in quite choppy conditions to see the Brunnich's guillemots and kittiwakes at close range. The sight, sound and smell was terrific! Those of us who stayed on the ship saw the birds at close range too but enjoyed the added benefits of warmth, cheese and wine but not necessarily in that order. Suddenly a cry went up from Delphine – a bear had been spotted on the cliff-top! It was not in view for long but, in silhouette, looked minute against the cliffs. As the ship turned away another fin whale was spotted.



Day 6 – Wednesday 17th July Wahlenbergfjorden



01Morning: wind S Beaufort 3; overcast; 5° C.

Mid-day: wind from NNE, Beaufort 1; clear sky; 5° C.

Evening: wind from SW, Beaufort 2; clear sky; 3° C.

Oxfordhalvøya.

08.00: GPS Position: 79° 46' N, 21° 32' E

By the time we arrived for breakfast Plancius was anchored off Oxfordhalvøya in Wahlenbergfjorden, with its wonderfully sheltered bay. This was a beautiful, almost desert-like, place but as soon as we landed it became clear it was full of wildflowers, giving complex and gentle shades to the landscape in a series of low ridges formed by ancient raised beaches. On the shore we found a dead polar bear cub – about half of them don't make it beyond their first year. We split into three groups, undertaking expeditions of varying lengths and objectives, but everyone appreciated the variety of plant life: spider plants, bog saxifrage, dwarf willow, scatters of Svalbard poppies, nodding lychnis and many other species. Near to the shore a pair of arctic skuas (parasitic jaeger in North America) were nesting. The long hikers had a chance to see red-throated diver, and a bear in the far and safe distance.

Leaving Wahlenbergfjorden, we took a brief diversion to watch a polar bear wandering above the shore of one of the Gyldenøyane (Golden Islands) a long, low outcrop along the north shore of the fjord, only to discover another bear at the far end. They may have been hunting for bird nests but the two didn't meet whilst we were there. From here we continued our passage; Louis gave a lecture on man's adaptations (and failures) in response to climate change in the Arctic. Meanwhile our own weather was changing – the light cloud was gradually dispersing and the breeze dropped as we steamed through calm waters and truly brilliant conditions.

Torellneset.

Later in the afternoon we anchored off Torellneset, a headland at the southern end of the Hinlopenstretet, similar to our morning's landing in its desert-like character, but here we found a group of walrus basking along the spit. One large individual particularly attracted everyone's attention by splashing into the water, foraging, snorting, and then coming up close to peer at the group. A very pale individual was lying separate from the others. To get so close to them was very exciting!

Bråsvellbreen.

22.00: GPS Position: 79° 18' N, 22° 28' E

Finally, given the superb conditions and cloudless sky, Delphine concocted one more treat – a diversion to look at the largest ice wall in Spitsbergen, the Bråsvellbreen (about 190 Km of ice cliff, dotted with waterfalls). They lie on the south and southeast coast of Nordaustlandet. We stayed until about midnight enjoying the view of this extraordinary feature in calm clear water as kittiwakes, fulmars and arctic terns circled around. On a distant ice floe, a single ringed seal completed the picture.



Day 7 – Thursday 18th July

Sundneset, Freemansundet & Dolerittneset, Edge Island



01Morning: wind from NE Beaufort 3; clear sky; 9° C.

Mid-day: no wind; clear sky; 11° C.

Evening: wind from S, Beaufort 3; overcast; 12° C.

Freemansundet.

07.15: GPS Position: 78° 16' N, 22° 15' E

Today we were lucky with the many letters in the alphabet, as we needed many to name all alternative plans. Overnight we had sailed towards Freemansundet, the small straight between Barents and Edge Island. Delphine had planned for us to go ashore at the eastern entrance, but this plan A was discarded as there was a mother and cub polar bear near our intended landing site. So up to plan B: a landing





at the western entrance near Sundneset. On our way to Sundneset we saw another 8 bears, several of them near our new intended landing site. So much for plan B... Hence plan C was formed and all Zodiacs were lowered and we did a Zodiac cruise near Sundneset, to have a look at those bears.

First we saw a very thin one, but he was just lying down on the tundra, just behind a cliff, not giving us too good looks. So we headed towards another bear that was seen walking along the shore. This bear was clearly interested in us, but was a little afraid to come much closer to have a look. Several times she was looking at us, hesitating to come closer, but she never dared. However, she gave us a good look as she slowly walked along the coast, followed, just off shore, by 10 black Zodiacs. After she had moved over a ridge, we spent some time exploring the area. On a cliff we found several pairs of black guillemots and even a pair of barnacle geese. After having a look at the cliff we found our bear lying on the tundra near the shore, so we had another look, even though some seemed more interested in the yellow bog saxifrage around the bear. As the bear didn't do much, we continued exploring the area.

Some went to have a look at some swimming black guillemots. Others went to have a look at three more bears, one single individual and a mother with cub that were high on the mountain. We all came together when we found the thin bear walking over a snow field, just before we had to turn back to the Plancius.

Doleritneset, Kapp Lee.

12.00: GPS Position: 78° 12' N, 21° 06' E

During lunch our captain moved the ship to the other side, to Doleritneset, a spit of land on Edge Island. To our surprise we didn't find any bears ashore, so we could even go ashore. Here there was a lot to see. History, wildlife, plants and scenery, all packed together in a 2-hour stroll. The oldest historical remains were a walrus graveyard from the 1600s. Here a large group of walrus were slaughtered for their skin, blubber and tusks. Their bones, useless and left behind, were a silent reminder of that history. A little less old was the ruin of an old Pomor hut, people from northern Siberia who came here to hunt in the 17th and 18th century. The most recent were some huts that were used by several scientific expeditions, one of which our own Louis took part in. Still very much alive was the reindeer that came to visit us and several snow buntings flying around. Another highlight was a couple of ptarmigan that showed nicely between some rocks and, for the florists amongst us, some arctic dandelion and of course many other flowers. We had just returned to the Plancius when a polar bear was spotted on the exact place where we just had walked, between the dandelion and the ptarmigan... A reminder for us all that we really have to pay attention and that bears can show up everywhere.



In the evening we had a recap where Distinguished, Delightful Delphine told us something about polar bears, Michelle and Simon about whaling and Louis about his experiences at Edge Island.

20.00: GPS Position: 77° 41' N, 19° 26' E

Day 8 – Friday 19th July

Hornsund



01Morning: wind from NEE Beaufort 2 to 5; overcast; 6° C.

Mid-day: wind from SSE, Beaufort 4, overcast; 7° C.

Evening: wind from ENE, Beaufort 3; drizzle; 5° C.

Brepollen.

08.00: GPS Position: 76° 54' N, 15° 11' E



1There was quite some swell when we entered Hornsund, which hindered a landing at Gåshamna, so our ship steamed further east towards Brepollen, a bay at the head of the fjord. Several glaciers flow into this bay, but since 20 years these glaciers have retreated more than 5 km! One can suspect here a sign of the global rising temperatures. A century ago these glaciers were even combined to one large glacier front, which has since broken down into the separate glaciers we saw today. During our approach of the Hornbreen, the major glacier, we observed a small pod of beluga whales, close

to the shore. Only the white backs were sometimes visible, but also the brownish-blackish ones of the calves.

Near the glacier front of Hornbreen a lot of kittiwakes were feeding. At the glacier front itself, due to the huge input of nutrients, combined with the continuous sunlight, creates good conditions for microscopic algae growth. And these tiny organisms are the base of the food chain. More exciting for the many birders were the ivory gulls.

Burgerbukta.

16.00: GPS Position: 77° 03' N, 16° 00' E

After lunch Michelle tried to convert us all to plant lovers, with an intriguing talk on how plants have adapted to the arctic environment. Thanks to these adaptations, how simple they seem to be, they are able to survive and reproduce successfully. Then it was time for a zodiac cruise to Burgerbukta. The name refers to Wilhelm Burger, member of a former Austrian expedition in 1872.



Icebergs in the most stunning shades of blue attracted our attention, and on some flocks of kittiwakes rested, seemingly indifferent to our presence. A huge colony of these birds was spotted on a mountain. On our way to the glacier front at the head of Burgerbukta, a few little auks were seen, swimming and diving

in the water. The glacier front delivered some suspense with some calving, creating each time a nice sequence of waves, lifting the zodiacs on a slow leisurely rhythm.

But let us not forget the mountains around us. Their lower slopes show a reddish-brown colour, reminding us of what we saw in the north of Spitsbergen, in the Woodfjorden area. Indeed, these are also Devonian old red sandstones. Lying upon these are strata of Carboniferous and Permian age, rather whitish of colour due to the carbonates, and in the highest parts darker sandstones of Triassic age.

This day ends with a nice barbecue with a lot of music, and everybody relaxing.

24.00: GPS Position: 76° 59' N, 15° 15' E

Day 9 – Saturday 20th July

Bellsund: Bamsebu & Ingerborgfjellet



01Morning: wind from E Beaufort 3; rain; 5° C.

Mid-day: calm, overcast; 5° C.

Bamsebu.

08.00: GPS Position: 77° 36' N, 14° 28' E

The old trappers hut and the adjacent piles of beluga bones were very close to the ship when it anchored this morning. The day was cloudy and a little windy too. Once the first boatloads were ashore the long hikers set off into the wilderness. After a very short walk Gerard went along some layers of sediments being uplifted in vertical position by the pressure of a collision between North-East Greenland and West Spitsbergen 50 million years ago. He found some fossils of shells and crustaceans burrows. Later on he spotted two reindeers on the tundra. It was not too difficult to approach them carefully. They were grazing peacefully at a distance of 50 meters without any change in their behaviour despite our presence. The short, leisurely, pottery walkers had by far the most excitement though. It came in the form of two big bears but they were nearly four miles away!



Ingerborgfjellet.



After lunch we landed on the north side of Bellsund near a place called Ingerborgfjellet. The tundra here was very lush and is a well known haunt of reindeer – we saw lots! On the scree slopes just back from the beach nests the most numerous and one of the smallest birds of Spitsbergen, Little Auk. Like the other members of the family they just come ashore during the summer to nest, the rest of their life is spent out at sea. Their cousins all eat fish but the Little Auks are so small that they eat plankton instead. To be precise, they eat planktonic crustaceans and they can carry up to 500 in their throat pouch back to

the chick. Some of the birds that we saw did have food for chicks. Because they are very vulnerable to predators such as gulls and foxes they nest up to a metre from the surface under rocks and large stones. At the bottom of the scree slope was a vantage point, from which we could see the birds on the rocks and others coming and going to/from the colony. Every time a Glaucous Gull flew by all the auks flew off and went round in big circles, until the danger was past. The same thing happened when an Arctic Fox went by as well. The sight and sound of the birds was absolutely tremendous. This place was a superb one to end our voyage, which had been full of many different adventures.

Once we were all back aboard we handed in our rubber boots and were then able to enjoy a drink in the lounge. Later on we were joined the captain and staff for a farewell cocktail prior to our last supper on the good ship *Plancius*.

Day 10 – Sunday 21st July

Longyearbyen - disembarkation

Today was the day when our big adventure finally ended and we finally had to leave the ship!

Text: Arjen, Bob, Louis, Michelle, Sandra, Simon.

Photos: Arjen, Gérard, Sandra.



World's Leading Polar
Expedition Operator

Total distance sailed on this voyage: 1,152 nautical miles or 1,325 statute miles or 2,133 kilometres.

Total number of photos taken: as many as guillemots in Alkefjellet.

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Nazarov, Expedition Leader Delphine Aures and all the crew and staff, it has been a pleasure travelling with you and we wish you a safe and enjoyable continuation of your journey. We also hope to see you on board *Plancius* again soon!