

# Annual report

# Svalbard Science Forum



Scientists on their way to field

Photo: C. Hübner

## 2008

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SVALBARD SCIENCE FORUM 2008

## Introduction

The Research Council of Norway holds strategic responsibility for Arctic research in Norway. On the basis of the report "Organization of Research on Svalbard", the Research Council's board of directors adopted the "Strategy for development of Svalbard as a research platform" in February 1998, and established the Svalbard Science Forum (SSF) as a three-year programme. The programme was prolonged with a revised mandate in 2001. In 2005 SSF was revitalized and reorganized by the Norwegian Interministerial Committee on Polar Affairs. The Forum was given a new mandate (See Appendix 1) with strategic tasks related to the coordination of research in Svalbard and facilitation tasks related to information for scientists and functions as networking and meeting place.

## The Svalbard Science Forum Board

In 2008, the SSF board members were:

**Karin Refsnes**, Project director, Division of Strategic Priorities, Department of Energy and Environment (Head of the SSF board)

**Kim Holmén**, Research Director, the Norwegian Polar Institute (NPI)

**Gunnar Sand**, Director, The University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS)

**Oddvar Midtkandal**, replaced by **Jon Erik Nygaard** in October, both: Director, Kings Bay AS (KB)

**Hajime Ito**, National Institute of Polar Research, Japan, head of Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee (NySMAC), , deputised by **Roland Neuber**, Alfred Wegener Institute, Germany, deputy head of NYSMAC

**Lisa Baddely** (since October 2008), European Incoherent SCATter Scientific Association (EISCAT), representative of the Longyearbyen Science and Education Forum (LYSEF)

The Governor of Svalbard (**Tor Punsvik**) and representatives from the research communities in Barentsburg (**Sergey Priamikov**) and Hornsund (**Piotr Glowacki**) have been invited to attend the SSF board meetings as observers.

The SSF secretariat is located in the Svalbard Science Centre in Longyearbyen and managed by two research coordinators: **Christiane Hübner** and **Marzena Kaczmarska** (in a 25% position). The research coordinators are employed through a contract with the Norwegian Polar Institute.

Two SSF board meetings were held during 2008 – on 15/16 May (Longyearbyen), and 20 October (Oslo). Board meeting minutes can be found at

<http://www.ssf.npolar.no/pages/boardMinutes.htm>.

# Activities of SSF in 2008 related to the mandate

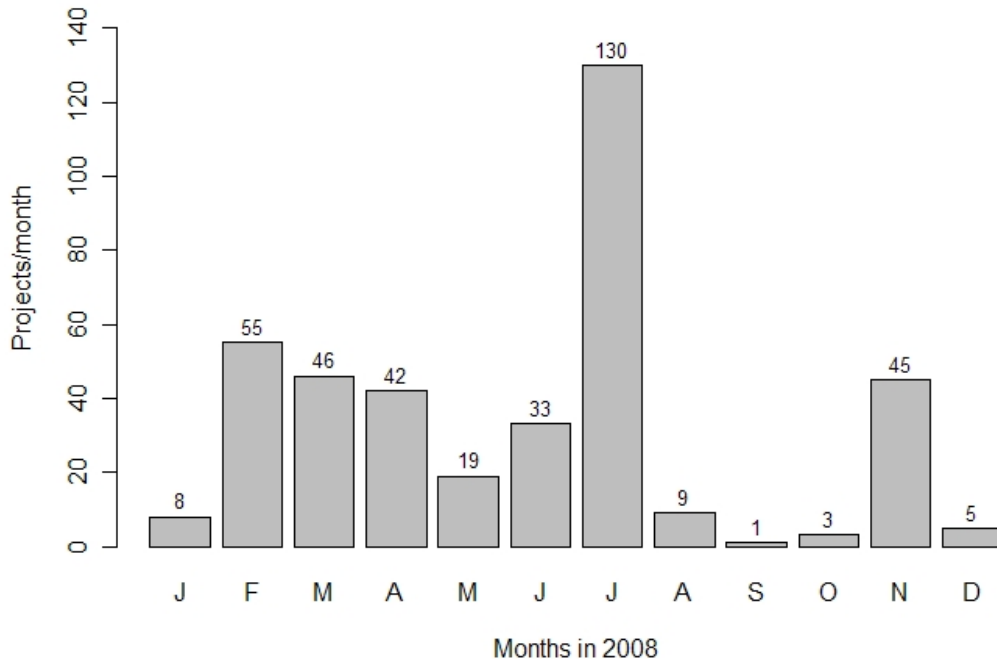
## 1 Strategic tasks:

### 1.1 Implement scientific coordination in accordance with strategy documents (including policy documents from the Research Council of Norway)

#### Research in Svalbard database

SSF has in cooperation with NPI developed the Research in Svalbard database - <http://www.svalbardscienceforum.no/pages/database.htm>. 2008 was the first year with the database in full operation. In February, the Governor of Svalbard send out a letter to the national and international research community that requested that all research projects need to be registered in the RiS database. This resulted in an increasing number of projects being registered in the database (Fig.1). At the end of the year 285 projects active in 2008 were registered. However, still many researchers chose to not register the projects and it is impossible to say which proportion of projects in Svalbard has been registered in 2008.

In March 2008, a new project administration unit was launched, that enables the SSF secretariat to conduct quality control of the entries in the database. It includes beside others a function to accept and reject entries, a limited editing function to edit spelling mistakes, and the possibility to transfer projects to a different user.



**Figure 1. Use of the RiS database.** Number of registered projects/month in 2008. The high number in July is caused by registrations made by internal summer workers at NPI/SSF. The sudden increase in November is due to the registration request for the Arctic Field Grant proposals.

In July, two summer workers were employed with the task to ‘clean’ the project registrations from the old RiS catalogue and merge double registrations. In addition, they searched the database Biblioline Arctic & Antarctic Regions with the keyword “Svalbard” and added relevant references from 1968 – June 2008 to the RiS database. The RiS database includes now more than 10.000 references of scientific Svalbard literature. Data from ENVINET and the AWI database were transferred to the RiS database and data set from an internal NPI metadatabase were added. The result of this work is an increase of consistence and reliability of the information in the RiS database.

The SSF secretariat has started using the RiS database as source of information and it has proven to be a valuable tool for coordination, information and outreach. However, it is important to increase the acceptance and use of this database within the research community in order to gather as complete information as possible.

### **SSF workshops**

SSF has arranged two workshops in 2008. In March, a workshop on marine research in Ny-Ålesund was held. During the revision of the Ny-Ålesund Science Plan it was agreed upon to build and implement flagship programs in order to release the full potential of complementary research and simultaneously increase the influence of KIRB in the scientific debate. The aim of the workshop was to initiate the first flagship programme for Ny-Ålesund: The Kongsfjorden System. As a result of this workshop, SSF in cooperation with the planning group for the workshop (Dr. Geir Wing Gabrielsen, Norwegian Polar Institute; Dr. Haakon Hop, NPI; Prof. Jan Marcin Weslawski Institute of Oceanology, Polish Academy of Sciences; Prof. Christian Wiencke, Alfred Wegener Institute; and Prof. Roland Kallenborn, University Centre in Svalbard) has produced a document that summarizes the status of research, identified knowledge gap, project suggestions and funding needs. It can be downloaded from the SSF-webpages ([http://www.svalbardscienceforum.no/documents/Flagship\\_KongsfjordenSystem\\_09.pdf](http://www.svalbardscienceforum.no/documents/Flagship_KongsfjordenSystem_09.pdf)) and is also available as printed copy in the Brief Report Series, NPI 011 (2009).

As topic for the second workshop, cooperation between the four research bases in Svalbard, Ny-Ålesund, Longyearbyen, Barentsburg and Hornsund was planned in summer 2008. However, this workshop had to be postponed due to logistical reasons and will now be held in summer 2009. Thus, a workshop on atmosphere research was held in autumn 2008 in order to initiate second flagship programme in Ny-Ålesund. As many as 11 international participants discussed ongoing research, gaps of knowledge and infrastructure needs in Ny-Ålesund, as well as cooperation possibilities with the other bases in Svalbard. The concluding document of this workshop is expected to be finished in end of 2009.

For 2009, another two workshops are planned, a process that started already in summer 2008.

## **1.2 Initiate new, update and revise science plans as well as other documents related to the coordination of research in Svalbard**

The revision of the Ny-Ålesund Science Plan has been paused until all research flagship programmes are initiated (see chapter 1) and focus areas for future research are identified. Those will then be implemented in the Science Plan.

The work on the new white paper on Svalbard (Stortingsmelding) as well as the document 'Norwegian Strategy for Polar Research' has been continued. Both documents will be finalized in spring 2009.

SSF also continued the work with Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System (SIAEOS) – a proposal to the European Strategy Forum on research Infrastructures ESFRI. SIAEOS has been added to the ESFRI roadmap in autumn 2008.

[www.forskningsradet.no/sios/](http://www.forskningsradet.no/sios/)

## **1.3 Promote the interests of science in matters that will influence scientific activities in Svalbard**

SSF has emphasized to be updated on matters that will influence scientific activities in Svalbard and has worked with strategy plans. SSF participated in all NySMAC meetings in 2008, and continued the close cooperation with Kings Bay AS and the Department for Environmental Affairs of the Governor of Svalbard.

In spring 2008 a new forum was established, the Longyearbyen Science and Education Forum (LySEF). SSF is a observer in LySEF and the European Incoherent SCATter Scientific Association (EISCAT) as representative of LySEF joined the SSF-board in October.

## **1.4 Award ear-marked funds for field research in Svalbard**

38 students and 31 researchers applied for the scholarship 'Arktisstipend' 2007 within the deadline of 20 November 2007. The total sum applied for was NOK 3 543 595.

The applications were evaluated by the evaluation committee (RCN, NPI, SSF, external referee) in January 2008. Among the applications, 3 student proposals and 9 researcher proposals were not found qualified for funding. 33 of the nominated students and 22 nominated researchers were granted a reduced amount of funds. The others were granted the full amount. In total, NOK 1 764 000 were granted, of which NOK 500 000 from NPI and the rest from RCN through funds provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

The scholarship for 2009 was announced with a deadline for applications by 20 November 2008 and in total 72 applications were received from students (42) and researchers (30). The evaluation committee will award the grants in late January 2009.

From autumn 2008 on, 'Arktisstipend' is renamed to "Arctic Field Grant" and the call of proposals, the online form and requirements are available in English only.

## **2 Facilitation tasks:**

### **2.1 Inform about the availability of infrastructure, including logistics, laboratories, field stations, observatories, office space, necessary applications and permissions, etc.**

In 2008, the SSF web portal ([www.svalbardscienceforum.no](http://www.svalbardscienceforum.no)) has been further improved and continuously updated. A checklist for research planning has been added in order to facilitate the application processes prior to field work in Svalbard. This checklist has been developed in cooperation with the Governor of Svalbard.

Also this year, SSF received frequently enquiries by phone, mail and personal visits. Researchers were mainly interested in practical logistical topics, as the choice of a study location, help with applications, funding possibilities, booking procedures, but also availability of data or cooperation possibilities.

SSF continued to give talks in Longyearbyen and participated in several conferences/meetings/workshops in order to promote Svalbard within the scientific community:

- Arctic Frontier in Tromsø: Svalbard Science Forum and research in Svalbard (poster)
- APECS meeting in St. Petersburg: Possibilities for you researchers in Svalbard (poster)
- SCAR/IASC meeting in St. Petersburg: Svalbard as platform for international & interdisciplinary research in the European High-Arctic (poster and talk)
- Workshop on Progress in Polar Research: "Nature of response of Arctic glaciers to climate warming" at Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, 27-30 Nov 2008; oral presentation: Glaciers and climate change – projects overview & perspectives for international cooperation in Svalbard" (invited speaker).

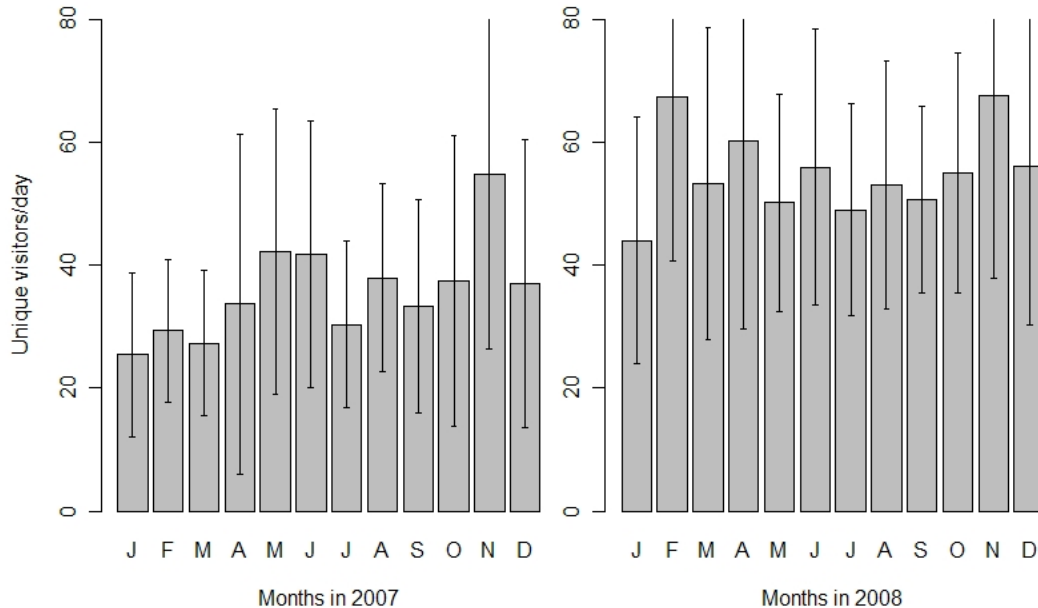
The SSF-folder has been distributed at these meetings and at other opportunities. Folders and posters have also been distributed to the guesthouses and the camp site in Longyearbyen.

More than 65 researchers visited the SSF secretariat in the Svalbard Science Centre and provided informed about their work as well as received information from the secretariat.

SSF published 120 news-items in 2008, including scientific results, planned projects, events and practical information for researchers in Svalbard.

### **2.2 Maintenance of a web-portal with important information for both Norwegian and foreign scientists**

Also in 2008, the SSF web portal [www.svalbardscienceforum.no](http://www.svalbardscienceforum.no) was frequently visited with an average of 55 visitors per day, including weekends. This is a strong increase of visits opposed to an average of 36 visitors/day in 2007 (see Figure 2). The visitors came mainly from Europe, but visits from all over the world were registered.



**Figure 2. Use of the SSF webportal start page.** Number of unique visitors/day averaged for each month +/- standard deviation in 2007 and 2008. The variable 'unique visitor' includes every IP-address only once/day, i.e. a person visiting the page several times during one day will only be counted once.

The portal includes following sections:

- Information about SSF including publications in pdf-format, eg. annual reports, board meeting minutes and the Ny-Ålesund Science Plan.
- Practical information related to fieldwork including a checklist for research planning, information about legislation and regulations, logistical considerations, contact information, and general information about climate and nature.
- Information about research activities including descriptions of the research bases, scientific talks held at seminars in Ny-Ålesund and Longyearbyen, links to blogs of scientific field work, the RiS database and information about IPY activities in Svalbard.
- Information about funding possibilities and upcoming scientific events in Svalbard
- News and news archive. The aim is to establish the SSF webportal as portal to science in Svalbard.
- Portal to the RiS database (see description above in chapter 1.1).

Users can subscribe to a weekly newsletter about the recent news articles published on the web portal. In December 2008 the newsletter had 117 subscriptions.

### **2.3 Communicate the societal significance of science in Svalbard**

SSF has given repeatedly talks about SSF and Svalbard as research platform to the public and interested groups and contributed with a lecture to the guide course organised by the tourist agency in Longyearbyen. In addition the board members have been actively promoting SSF in numerous public appearances.

SSF received requests from administrative and governmental authorities about statistics on research in Svalbard, eg. how many nations do research in Svalbard or how many IPY research projects are active in Svalbard. Local companies and authorities used SSF as source for information related to research in Svalbard. SSF was also contacted by several artists who were interested in cooperation with researchers, as well as journalist interested in information about research topics and seeking contacts with researchers. These requests indicate that knowledge about the service that SSF can offer has been spreading towards to different groups in Norway and abroad and strengthens the role of SSF within outreach activities.

On 1 August, a solar eclipse was visible in Svalbard and SSF, in cooperation with EISCAT and UNIS, organised a 'eclipse event' in front of Svalbard Science Centre, including a model of the solar system, visualisation of the solar eclipse by a telescope, sale of protective sun glasses and solar eclipse cookies. Between 300-400 interested people gathered for his event.

The Science Day in Longyearbyen was arranged on 18 October 2008 in cooperation with UNIS and NPI. SSF contributed with a quiz-trail to the four research bases in Svalbard (Hornsund, Barentsburg, Longyearbyen and Ny-Ålesund), a bird quiz and general assistance to the event.

### **3 Other activities**

SSF participated in following meetings during 2008: NySMAC meetings (4/5 March in Lillestrøm, Norway; 4/5 November, Brest, France), LySEF meetings (21 February, 13 May, 11 December), the 'Polardag' arranged by the Research Council of Norway 14 May, NorACIA 'fagmøte' (27/28 October) and several other meetings with UNIS, NPI, Kings Bay AS and the Governor of Svalbard.

SSF participated in several representative occasions, as the opening of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault on 25/26 February and a dinner on bord the Italian scientific vessel OGS/Explora during a visit to Ny-Ålesund and Longyearbyen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, the Italian Embassy in Oslo, the Research Council of Italy (CNR) and The National Institute of Oceanography and Experimental Geophysics (OGS). The Secretariat was also involved in preparations for the visit of the main board of the Research Council in Norway to Svalbard 24-26 September. We have also received a visit from the Embassy of Poland in Oslo (4 July 08)

## **4. Conclusion**

SSF had a busy year, also in 2008. Due to the increased number of project registrations in the RiS database, many activities were related to database quality control, assistance to users and further development of the database. Another important part of the work in the secretariat was related to the workshops, including planning and arranging the workshops as well as writing the concluding documents together with the planning groups. The workshops have resulted in very positive feedback within the scientific community and should be in the future one of the main activities of SSF. In combination, the RiS database, the workshops and the information activities build a good base for the coordination tasks of SSF. SSF has established a solid position as information portal and could this year increasingly promote Svalbard as research platform rather than purely to inform about SSFs activities.

# Appendix 1

## **Mandate and terms of reference of Svalbard Science Forum**

A plan for reorganising Svalbard Science Forum was approved by the Interministerial Committee on Polar Affairs in January 2005. In June 2005, SSF was reorganized and given new tasks related to the coordination of research in Svalbard.

SSF reports to the Research Council of Norway through the Norwegian National Committee on Polar Research. The Research Council reports the activity of SSF on an annual basis to the Interministerial Committee on Polar Affairs.

Present members of SSF are: The Research Council of Norway (Head), The University Centre in Svalbard, Norwegian Polar Institute, Kings Bay AS, Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee (NySMAC), and Longyearbyen Science and Education Forum (LySEF).

### **Strategic tasks**

- Implement scientific coordination in accordance with strategy documents (including policy documents from the Research Council of Norway)
- Initiate new, update and revise science plans as well as other documents related to the coordination of research in Svalbard
- Promote the interests of science in matters that will influence scientific activities in Svalbard
- Award ear-marked funds for field research in Svalbard

### **Facilitation tasks**

- Information
- Inform about the availability of infrastructure, including logistics, laboratories, field stations, observatories, office space, necessary applications and permissions, etc.
- Maintenance of a web-portal with important information for both Norwegian and foreign scientists
- Communicate the societal significance of science in Svalbard
- Meetings - Arrange relevant workshops, conferences etc. – networking and "meeting place" functions.