

The sun's excrement

This stone I found in Narsarsuaq close to one of the abandoned military buildings just outside the village.

I would not have noticed the stone itself, but for the beautiful, orange growth at the top of the stone.

The explanation behind the orange guest on the stone is a small wonder in the magnificent scenery that surrounds this village in the southern Greenland.

Let us start with the stone. Its location is important. It has for years, perhaps decades, been located in such a way that it is slightly higher than the surroundings in a large almost flat area. The area around the stone is only sparsely vegetated. This means that even a small creature has very good overview of the surroundings from the top of the stone.

This place with a view the small birds have made use of. From this stone, especially the Wheatear let his voice sound and tells the world that this is his territory. The birds tend to throw their white droppings in all

places where they are staying. This has also happened for years on this stone.

Now we come to the explanation of the orange growth. It is lichen, called *Xanthoria borealis*. The lichen utilizes the bird droppings on the stone. The lichen could not exist on this barren rock if it were not for the help of the birds.

But what is lichen? Here we have the next small wonder. The lichen is a symbiotic relationship between two organisms: An alga and a fungus. Together, we call it lichen. The cooperation between the two small organisms keeps them both alive.

The lichen is very hardy and can grow almost anywhere. It must be one of the most abundant organisms in Greenland. No place is too cold, too dry or too hot for the lichens to grow.

The orange colour seems unreal here on the stone in Narsarsuaq. Orange is the colour of the sun and the polar Inuits in North Greenland have called the lichen 'sunain anak' – the sun's excrement.



Narsarsuaq, South Greenland, June 2014