

Niviarsiak

The Greenlandic name means 'a young unmarried girl', but can also mean 'Miss' or 'nurse'. It exists everywhere in Greenland, and it is today Greenland's national flower.

When hiking in the mountains I often walk on the mountain fields. These areas can seem dry and dusty. The mountain fields are crisscrossed by large and small brooks that bring melt water from the mountain tops down to the sea. Some of these brooks dry up during the summer, and it is here that I in the middle of the dusty gray-green grass and the willow scrub find these pink large flowers. They seem like strangers here in the cold climate where flowers usually are small and more invisible.

Chamerion latifolium is its Latin name; the Broad-leaved Willowherb (River Beauty) is common in gravelly places all over Greenland. The Willowherb or Niviarsiak, as it is called in Greenlandic, stands out from many other flowers in that, unlike other Arctic flowers, they are tall and have large petals.

The Willowherb is everywhere in the wilderness and also inside the settle-

ments at roadsides. In the Greenlandic mountain fields there are a lot of small brooks with melt water, which quickly dries out in the summer. The surroundings along these dry brook beds are one of the favourite habitats for the Willowherb. In many places, the Willowherb colours an entire mountain-side pink with its oversized flowers.

The stems of the flower are also red. The red-dyed flowers are very characteristic in the Arctic. Biologists have found that the colour red increases in plants, which are exposed to intense sunlight or severe cold. The red-dyeing is probably an adaptation to the Arctic climate because the plants with the red colour are heated relatively more than plants with other colours because the absorption of the radiation of heat is improved

The Willowherb or Niviarsiak had previously been a favourite integrity, when the Inuits eat seal-blubber. During the world wars, the dried leaves of the plant were used as a tea substitute, and in Greenland the leaves also have been used as a substitute for tobacco.



Niviarsiak, July 2001