



Rain can be welcome

No such thing as bad weather

Deputy Head of Republican Hydrometeorological Centre Anatoly Polishchuk explains why weather forecasts are not always as reliable as might be expected

What is the accuracy of most of your forecasts?

I'd say 96 percent — by international standards. It's impossible to predict with 100 percent accuracy, as atmospheric processes are very complicated. From Belarus alone, more water evaporates each day than is contained in Lake Naroch — about 14,000 tankers full! This forms clouds and makes summer particularly unpredictable for rain-fall.

Have you noticed that temperature forecasts tend to be up to 5°C inaccurate, and those for the city within 2°C? If we aren't within two degrees, forecasts are inaccurate. We give the maximum temperature for the day (which reaches its peak at 4pm) and that for the night is given as the minimum (around 6 am).

Are weathermen geographers or mathematicians?

I graduated from Odessa Hydrometeorological Institute where we didn't study geography! The school syllabus is enough. You only study physics and mathematics, understanding how air mass and underlying surfaces interconnect, the difference between high and low pressure and how evaporation

works. Engineer-meteorologists work at our meteorology centre.

Surely it must be easy to predict storms?

I remember once, at the end of July, we expected strong winds and a thunder storm. The radar showed that the cloud was heading towards the capital so we issued a storm warning. However, the cloud skirted around Minsk and hit Borisov. The weathermen could see this happening but remained silent, which was potentially dangerous. It's always better to err on the side of caution: like taking an umbrella on the off chance of rain. If you aren't prepared, it can be unpleasant!

Does it offend you to hear people complaining about inaccurate forecasts?

Of course, it is a slight but you get used to it. I'm confident in the skills of our professionals as we tend to be able to predict up to three days ahead. We also make specialised forecasts: for heat and power plants, the ring roads, highways, fishermen and so on...

Have you ever been caught in unexpected rain — like a shoe-maker without shoes?

Sometimes. Some people swear by superstitions, such as swallows

flying low. However, there are always scientific explanations. Rain coincides with low air pressure which causes midges to hover lower; birds fly low to eat them.

It's also said that rituals can be performed to influence the weather...

It's impossible to predict with 100 percent accuracy, as atmospheric processes are very complicated. From Belarus alone, more water evaporates each day than is contained in Lake Naroch — about 14,000 tankers full! This forms clouds and makes summer particularly unpredictable for rainfall.

There are three things you can do to affect the atmosphere. You can inspire rainfall earlier by firing guns at rain clouds or by spraying nitric silver or cement at them (this cre-

ates a nucleus of condensation on which water vapour will settle). Finally, you can disperse fog by generating high-frequency sounds; major airports do this to keep scheduled flights running on time. Everything is mathematically calculated.

Does someone intervene into the celestial chancellery's plans in our country?

No, never. The president of the country adopts the decision to impact on atmospheric processes although there were some developments. However, there is no special unit of the Armed Forces used for this and, anyway, you can't escape the laws of physics. If clouds are dispersed near Moscow, there could be rainfall, near Smolensk.

If it rains in Moscow, will the same follow in Minsk soon after?

No — as about 80 percent of our weather comes from the west, not the east. The prevailing wind is from the north-west or west.

Do you have the public phoning your centre?

Yes (sighing). Some phone constantly, mainly pensioners; they listen to the radio attentively, giving a description of each forecaster and taking offence at inaccurate predictions. Others complain about the

weather forecast being given for Europe before Minsk. Of course, we do this because what you hear last is always most memorable.

Do your friends ask for forecasts?

It happens. My wife also once worked as a forecaster; we met while studying. Our daughters have taken different paths; the elder studied IT marketing while the younger is studying psychology. There are forecasters among our relatives though.

Which is your favourite weather?

That which follows the forecast!

The highest point in the country is Novogrudok while the lowest is Lelchitsy. Minsk is almost at the same height as Novogrudok and the weather station near Moskovsky bus station is situated at 200m above sea level. About 1,500 people work on gathering and processing weather data in Belarus, across 52 weather stations and each region's meteorology centre. In Minsk, there are meteorology centres at Minsk National Airport, at Minsk-1 airport, at the observatory and at Kolodishchi. However, all analysis is carried out at the Republican Hydrometeorological Centre.

Natural symbol of city and district

Belarus' first Museum of Nightingales to open in the town of Slutsk

By Vera Gromova

The nightingale is a natural symbol of the Slutsk District, as adopted by the Slutsk District Council of Deputies, supervised by the Slutsk Ecological-Biological Centre of Pupils. The latter are collecting encyclopaedic data on the bird, alongside liter-

ary works devoted to the nightingale, while making decorative-and-applied artworks: postcards, hand-sewn goods, figurines and pictures. A library of nightingale song is planned, in addition to records of songs about these birds; moreover, an edition entitled *Family Names of Nightingale Families* is to be published, featuring

photos, family stories and archives.

The Chairman of the district branch of APB-Birdlife Belarus Association, Natalia Buryachenko, tells us that a museum room already operates at the Centre, devoted to the Slutsk District's natural symbol. It showcases several exhibits dedicated to the nightingale: hand-made items,

drawings, figurines and literary works.

In 2007, Slutsk received the status of a nightingale city, as a result of the Nightingale — Bird of the Year national campaign, organised by APB-Birdlife Belarus. According to Ms. Buryachenko, in 2011, the city and the district registered over 500



Nightingale sings

nightingales (one bird per 6 hectares, which is a good figure).

The Centre plans to address heads of city enterprises, asking them to use the 'Slutsk Nightingale' slogan on their products. Meanwhile, local ecologists are to name a street in Slutsk's Novodvortsy suburb after the bird: Solovynaya.