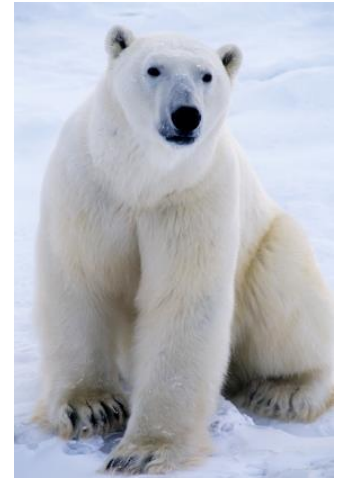


Polar Bear

Polar bears, or "sea bears," are the world's largest land predators, weighing up to 600 kg and measuring up to 3 m tall. On average they live to be about 25 years old, reaching maturity at around 4 years.

Although they appear white or yellow in colour, their fur is actually clear and hollow, and their skin is black. Their very pale colouring is caused by the reflection and scattering of light.



Inhabiting the ice and sea of the Arctic, polar bears are well-equipped for survival in a harsh environment. Two coats of fur and a thick layer of blubber help insulate the polar bear's body from the cold, keeping its temperature at an even 37° C. In addition, polar bears' paws are especially adapted for walking on the ice and swimming in the sea. Hairs and bumps on the soles of their feet provide grips, while webbing between their toes allows for effective swimming strokes.

Polar bears are also equipped with strong noses. They use their powerful sense of smell when hunting for seals, their main source of food. They can smell a seal's breathing hole up to one mile away. Once located, a polar bear will wait patiently by the hole and attack the seal's head when it comes up for air. In ideal hunting conditions, the bear will just eat the seal fat, leaving the carcass for other animals. However, when food is scarce, polar bears will eat just about anything. Other foods include



walrus, short-legged reindeer, birds, bird eggs, kelp, and beached whales. When close to human settlements, they have even been known to eat rubbish such as Styrofoam.

Polar bears do not hibernate like other bears, but females do enter into a dormant state while pregnant. After mating in the spring, a female polar bear spends the summer eating large amounts of food and building a maternity den in a snow drift to prepare for the arrival of her cubs.

In the autumn, she enters into a dormant state, remaining this way even as she gives birth. The litter, usually two cubs, will spend two years with their mother learning essential hunting and survival skills.

Why are polar bears important?

If polar bears were to go extinct, the population of walrus, seals, whales, reindeer, rodents and birds would increase and get out of

control. ... Since seals create breathing holes, in about 100 to 200 years this will break up the ice and split the Arctic circle.

Polar bears eat almost only seals, but if they can't hunt for that food source due to lack of enough ice or pure exhaustion, they'll quickly move on to others. This could threaten the existence of other Arctic species, like the Arctic fox or the walrus, as they compete for food resources.

Scavengers like the Arctic fox and Arctic birds like the snowy owl depend on big kills from polar bears as sources for food as well. If they're not killing seals, they're cutting out another food source for wildlife

If the population of seals increases without polar bears to control their population numbers, that could threaten the population of crustaceans and fish, an important food source for local human populations as well as other Arctic wildlife.

Conservation Status

Polar bears are currently listed as vulnerable by [IUCN's Red List](#). Global warming greatly impacts the fate of the polar bear. A reduction of large masses of ice results in limited access to seals. Not only does this adversely affect the health of adult polar bears, it also holds up the successful reproduction and nourishment of new bear cubs. Rising temperatures also result in unstable maternity dens, as snowdrifts melt and collapse.



What You Can Do to Help

To help save the polar bear habitat, you can support things which reduce global warming such as using renewable energy, recycling as much as possible and avoid using fossil fuels such as coal and use more eco-friendly forms of transport.

Polar Bear Range

Polar bears live in the sea and ice masses of the Arctic circle.

