

POLAR BEAR



SPECIES POLAR BEAR

FACTS

Polar bears are classified as marine mammals because they spend most of their lives on the sea ice of the Arctic Ocean. They have a thick layer of body fat and a water-repellant coat that insulates them from the cold air and water. Considered talented swimmers, they can sustain a pace of six miles per hour by paddling with their front paws and holding their hind legs flat like a rudder.

Polar bears spend over 50% of their time hunting for food. A polar bear might catch only one or two out of ten seals it hunts, depending on the time of year and other variables. Their diet mainly consists of ringed and bearded seals because they need large amounts of fat to survive.

WHY THEY MATTER

Polar bears are at the top of the food chain and have an important role in the overall health of the marine environment. Over thousands of years, polar bears have also been an important part of the cultures and economies of Arctic peoples. Polar bears depend on sea ice for their existence and are directly impacted by climate change—serving as an important indicator species.

THREATS

Polar bears depend on sea ice as a platform from which to hunt seals, rest and breed. The summer sea ice has been decreasing in size for decades and melting for longer periods of time. Bears must move longer distances to stay with the rapidly receding ice.

In most areas, they come ashore when ice melts and rely on fat stores until the ice refreezes so they can go back out to hunt. Some polar bears may suffer from malnutrition. In extreme cases—especially females with cubs—they may face starvation.

PROTECTION

Scientists believe that a natural safety net of ice in the High Arctic of Canada and Greenland covering 320 million acres—or twice the size of Texas—may persist longer than the ice anywhere else. Since 1992, WWF has been working with partners to sustainably preserve the rich biodiversity of this region.

Now, WWF works with local people to establish an appropriate management plan for this “last ice area” in Canada and Greenland. This plan could provide many benefits, such as conserving habitat for Arctic ice dependent species and protecting the cultural heritage and economies of local communities.

All information comes directly from the World Wildlife Fund Website

