



# Polar Bear

## FACTSHEET



*Female polar bear with yearlings.  
Churchill, Manitoba Canada*

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## KEY THREATS

- **Loss of sea ice habitat** through rapid climate change.
- **Loss of primary prey** due to reduced sea ice and snow cover, which impacts seal health and abundance.
- **Increased industrial activities**, primarily oil and gas exploration and development, which can disturb denning females.

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The largest bear species in the world and the Arctic's top predator, polar bears play an important role in the overall health of the Arctic marine environment. At least two thirds of the world's polar bears live in Canadian territory, giving Canadians a special relationship with and responsibility for these charismatic icons.

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## POLAR BEARS NEED SEA ICE AND SNOW

Polar bears need ice and snow to survive. Sea ice acts as a hunting, breeding and movement platform for polar bears, and is central to the entire Arctic marine food web.

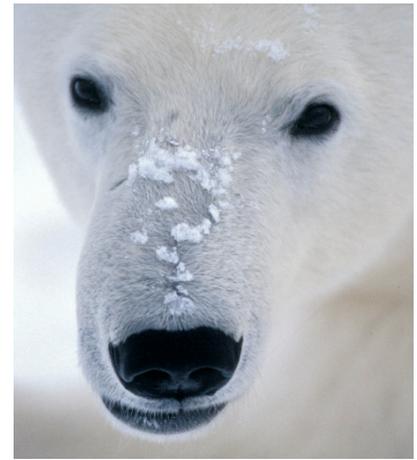
In late fall, pregnant polar bears dig a snow den where they give birth to their cubs in the winter. The mother bears then rear their young until they are strong enough to make the trek to the sea ice in the spring in search of seal pups. Ringed seals, the polar bear's main food source, also use snow to construct their birthing lairs on the sea ice.

Sea ice forms the basis of the Arctic marine ecosystem, supporting a mostly hidden world of life, from sea ice algae and tiny zoo-plankton, to polar fish and seals, all the way up to the massive bowhead whale.

Decreasing sea ice habitat has been shown to impact polar bear movements. GPS collar research has documented polar bears spending more time on land, and undertaking longer swims in response to receding sea ice. These long swims take a lot of energy, and can be dangerous, especially for younger polar bears.

# FUN FACTS ABOUT POLAR BEARS

- The Latin name for polar bear is *Ursus maritimus*, which means 'sea bear.'
- Male polar bears can be up to twice as large as females, typically weighing between 780 and 1,500 lbs and measuring 8 to 10 ft. long.
- Polar bears are proficient swimmers. Their body fat stores make them buoyant, and they use their large forepaws to paddle and their hind legs as rudders.
- Polar bears have large paws the size of dinner plates that evenly distribute their weight so they don't fall through the sea ice.
- Polar bears have 3 sets of eyelids; the third helps protect their eyes from the glare of snow and ice.
- Polar bears have translucent fur that appears white, but under their fur, their skin is black. They also have bluish-black tongues.



26,000

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF POLAR BEARS IN THE WORLD

30%

PROJECTED GLOBAL DECLINE OF POLAR BEARS BY 2050

19

SUBPOPULATIONS, 13 OF WHICH ARE FOUND IN CANADA

3

SUBPOPULATIONS CURRENTLY IN DECLINE

We are seeing declines in body condition and abundance in many populations for which we have the best data. Large knowledge gaps remain for polar bears outside of Canada and in the high Arctic. The increasing McClintock Channel population is rebounding due to successful management initiatives.

# HOW WWF-CANADA HELPS POLAR BEARS

- Supporting studies on how reductions in sea ice will affect the distribution, food habits and survival of polar bears in Canada.
- Helping to implement and fund a polar bear monitoring and patrol program in Arviat, Nunavut, to reduce the number of negative human-polar bear interactions.
- Monitoring the effects of proposed ice-breaking in northern Baffin Island on ringed seals, the primary prey item of polar bears.
- Working with local people and governments to protect key habitats for polar bears, including denning areas, Lancaster Sound and the Last Ice Area.

## Trends in Polar Bear Subpopulations

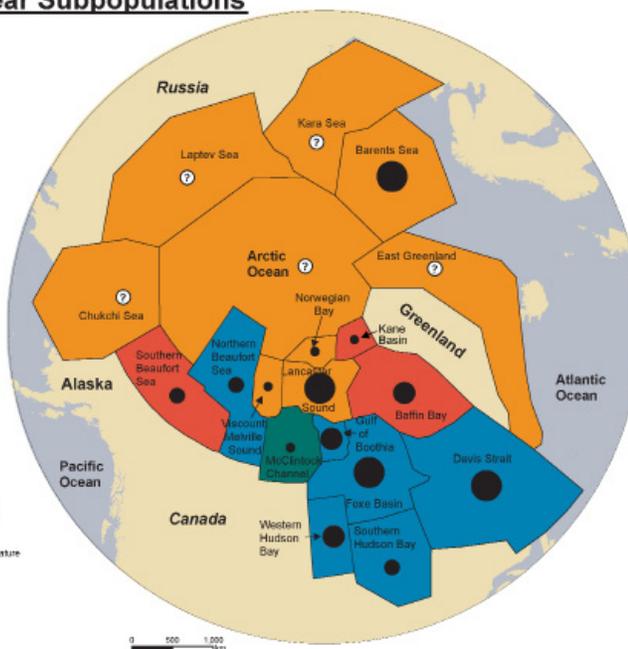
### Subpopulation size

No. of Bears

- <500
- 500-1,000
- 1,000-2,000
- 2,000-3,000
- ⊙ Unknown

### Population Trend (2015)

- Stable
- Increasing
- Declining
- Data deficient



Produced by World Wildlife Fund Canada, May 2015  
 Sources: Polar Bear Specialist Group, January 2015  
 Range Boundaries IUCN, 2012  
 Projection: North Pole Stereographic  
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### Why we are here.

We are creating solutions to the most serious conservation challenges facing our planet, helping people and nature thrive.

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## Information

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