

Did You Know That:

1. Polar bears are born in dens built into snow banks?
2. A polar bear's stomach can hold 150 pounds of food? That is more than 600 slices of pizza!
3. Polar bears can smell a seal from 20 miles away?
4. The Inuit word for polar bear is "Nanook?"
5. A polar bear swims with its eyes open, and nostrils closed.

What is a polar bear's favorite food?

A polar bear's favorite meal is the ringed seal, but it will eat any seal that it can catch. A polar bear is a very smart animal and it will try many different ways to catch a seal. The most common way is to wait by a seal's breathing hole in the ice until a seal emerges. A polar bear likes to be clean and will wash itself often during its meal.

If a polar bear cannot find a seal it will scavenge upon whale carcasses, small rodents like lemmings, sea birds, fish, kelp, berries, and human garbage.

Threats to the polar bear

Polar bears live for 15 to 18 years. They have no natural predators other than humans. There is now an international treaty that limits the number of polar bears that can be hunted.

There is a growing concern about the impact of oil spills and toxic chemicals on polar bears. Oil causes their fur to lose its insulating properties and contaminates their food sources. Global warming is also presenting a challenge to the polar bears. The sea ice, its natural habitat, is thinning.

BOOKS TO READ

Animal Close Ups-The Polar Bear by Valerie Tracqui (Massachusetts: Charlesbridge Publishing, 1994). Grades 2 through 4.

Alaska's Three Bears by Shelley Gill (Washington: Sasquatch Books, 1990). Grades K through 3.

Endangered! Bears by Casey Horton (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1996).

Polar Bears by Emilie Lepthien (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1991).

Polar Bear Cubs by Downs Matthews (New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1989).

WEB SITES TO VISIT

Seaworld: Polar Bears. Lots of information with a great index. seaworld.org/en/animal-info/animal-infobooks/polar-bears

Polar Bears International. A polar bear web cam. polarbearsinternational.org

National Geographic Kids. Polar Bear facts, photos, and video. <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/polar-bear>

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The Polar Bear



Where do polar bears live?
How do they stay warm in the Arctic?
What do polar bears eat?



The Peary-MacMillan
Arctic Museum
& Arctic Studies Center

Bowdoin College

Ursus Maritimus

Ursus Maritimus is the scientific name for polar bear. It means sea bear in Latin. A polar bear spends most of its life on the Arctic sea ice and in the water. Polar bears live only in the Arctic.

A male polar bear is called a boar, a female is called a sow, and babies are called cubs. Polar bears are solitary animals. They travel alone, although mother polar bears will stay with their cubs for a year or two before leaving them on their own.



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How do polar bears keep warm?

A polar bear is able to stay warm in the cold arctic temperatures because of its special physical characteristics. The polar bear's body is designed so that it is very good at absorbing and retaining heat.

A polar bear may look white but its skin is actually black. The black skin helps the animal absorb heat from the sun. A polar bear's creamy white appearance is from its fur. The polar bear's four-inch-thick fur directs the sun's warmth into its skin.

Blubber is a thick layer of insulating fat. It helps keep polar bears, as well as other marine mammals such as seals, warm when they are swimming in the cold Arctic waters. The polar bear is so good at storing heat, that when the Arctic gets warm in the summer the bear has to find ways to cool down. Polar bears move slowly in the summer months, take lots of naps, and go swimming a lot to not overheat.

Getting around

The polar bear spends most of its time on sea ice where it can hunt seals. The polar bear has huge, dinner plate sized furry feet that act like snowshoes. They help spread out the polar bear's weight so that it does not fall through thin ice. The pads on the polar bear's paws have tiny bumps, called papillae, which feel like sandpaper. These bumps create friction that prevents the polar bear from slipping on the ice.

Polar bears are good swimmers. They paddle with their front feet and they use their back legs as rudders. Polar bears can stay underwater for about two minutes and can swim for several hours and many miles.



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How many words can you make from the letters in **URSUS MARITIMUS**?

1	6
2	7
3	8
4	9
5	10

What are polar bears called when they get caught in the rain?

1+4 2+2 5+2 1+1 0+2 5+5 6+2

1+0 4+2 2+1 1+3 0+0 !

5=D 3=A 7=I 0=S 1=B
2=Z 4=R 8=Y 10=L 6=E