



Polar Bear



© Elisabeth Kruger / WWF-US

Latin Name: *Ursus maritimus*

Inuktitut Name: Nanuk or nanuq

COSEWIC Stats:

Special concern, last assessed in 2008

SARA Status:

Schedule 1, special concern

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 availability and abundance.
- Increased industrial activities, primarily oil and gas exploration and development, which can disturb denning females.

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.

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 also been shown to impact polar bear movements. GPS collar research has documented 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.

Trends in Polar Bear Subpopulations

SUBPOPULATION SIZE (Number of bears)

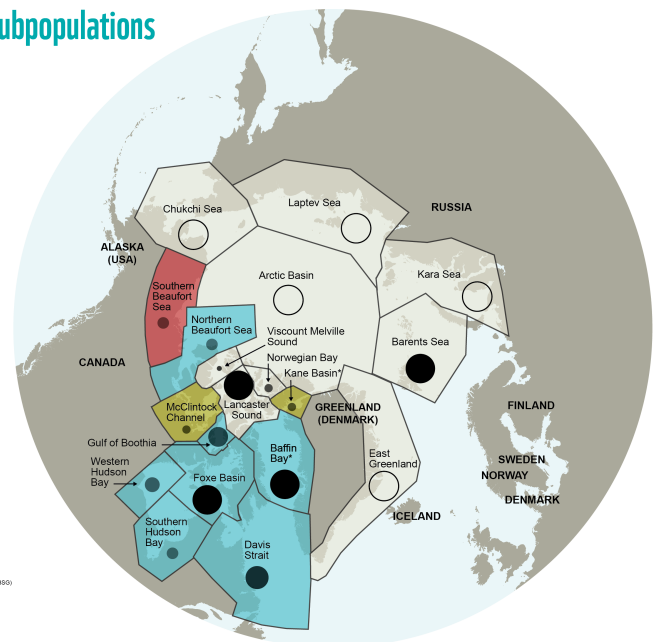
- < 200
- 200-500
- 500-1000
- 1000-1500
- 1500-2000
- 2000-2500
- 2500-3000
- Unknown

POPULATION TREND (2017)

- Stable
- Increasing
- Declining
- Data deficient

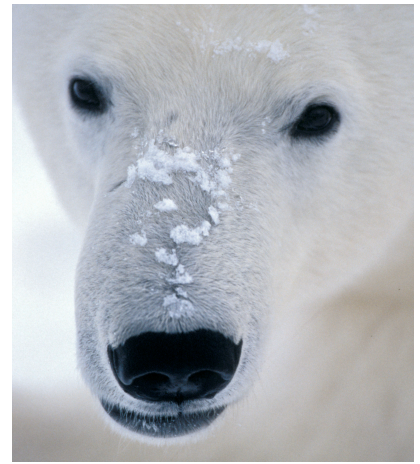


Produced by WWF Canada, June 2017.
Source: IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group,
June 2017. Population trends not yet officially designated by IUCN.
Range coordinates: 10°N-20°N.
Projection: North Pole Stereographic.
© 1986. Polar bears are the World Wildlife Fund's
for nature (also known as the World Wildlife Fund).
© WWF is a WWF Registered Trademark.



FUN FACTS ABOUT POLAR BEARS

- The Latin name for polar bear is *Ursus maritimus*, which means 'sea bear.'
- Typically, an adult male polar bear is an astonishing 8-10 ft. long and weighs between 780 and 1,500 lbs!
- 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

POLAR BEARS IN THE WORLD

30%

PROJECTED GLOBAL DECLINE OF POLAR BEARS BY 2050

19

SUBPOPLUATIONS, 13 OF WHICH ARE FOUND WITHIN OR SHARED BY CANADA

1

POPULATION IN DECLINE

Though most of Canada's polar bear subpopulations are stable, we are seeing declines in body condition and abundance. 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 HELPS POLAR BEARS

- Supporting studies on how reductions in sea ice will affect the distribution of polar bears in the Arctic Archipelago.
- 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.
- Work with local people and government to protect key marine areas for polar bears, including the Last Ice Area and Tallurutiup Imanga (Lancaster Sound).



Information

Brandon Laforest
Senior Specialist, Arctic Species and Ecosystems
WWF-Canada
blaforest@wwfcanada.org