

POLAR BEAR

Phylum *Chordata*, Class *Mammalia*, Order *Carnivora*, Family *Ursidae*,
Ursus Maritimus

Polar Bear – Polar bears are considered to be the largest land carnivores on earth. They are pure white in winter, and have a golden coat in summer and autumn. Their hind legs are longer than their front legs, and they have a long neck.

Status: Conservation Dependent. Listed on CITES: Appendix II. They are hunted for meat and fur. Global warming is a serious threat.



Habitat: Southern edge of the Arctic ice pack. They spend most of their time on arctic ice floes, and when they are on shore they stay near the water.

Range: Polar bears inhabit all Arctic seas and coastlines.

Diet: They are the most completely carnivorous members of the bear family. Ringed seals are their main diet, but they also eat young walruses, bearded seals, harp seals, and lemmings. Polar bears also graze on grasses, kelp, crowberries, and mushrooms.

Size: Shoulder height is about 5 feet. They range from 7 to 9 feet in length.

Weight: Adults weigh between 700 and 1500 pounds.

Life Span: Up to 25 years

Fact File:

- Polar bears evolved from brown bears about three million years ago. Fossil remains of a large extinct subspecies (*U.m.tyrannicus*) were excavated at a site near London in 1964.
- Polar bears are the animal most likely to kill humans for food. They are more than capable of outrunning a man.
- Their large, furry feet act as snowshoes.
- The hair of the polar bear is not actually pigmented white. It is unpigmented and hollow. It picks up the color of its surroundings. The hollow hairs also are excellent insulators, as they trap their radiating body heat.
- Polar bears are so well insulated that they can overheat at temperatures above 50 degrees Fahrenheit. When viewed with infrared cameras they are barely visible. Only the pads of their feet, their nose, and eyes emit detectable heat.
- They are able to fast for months, drawing on stored fat at any time of the year.
- Their fur is dense and water-repellant, enabling them to shake dry after swimming.
- Polar bears are superb swimmers. They have slightly webbed feet.
- When hunting seals, polar bears will stand or lie by the seal's blowhole for hours.
- Polar bears do not usually hibernate during the winter, but they do become lethargic. This enables them to rest and conserve their fat reserves.



Breeding and Care of Young: Polar bears are normally solitary. In midsummer they pair off for a few days to mate. The female then retreats to her den. From 1 to 3 cubs are born during the winter. The cubs are very dependent on their mother and stay with her for 2 years.

Threats to Survival: Global warming could wipe out polar bears by 2100. The Arctic is warming at least twice as fast as the rest of the globe. Sea ice is melting and retreating. The ice platform is their habitat. Polar bears do not catch seals in the water, but when they come up through the ice to breathe. Less ice means less food for the polar bears. It also means the bears could become trapped on or near shore in the summer and fall.

Conservation Efforts: The IUCN/World Conservation Union categorizes animal species they feel are threatened. The polar bear is listed as vulnerable by the IUCN/World Conservation Union. This means the species is likely to move into the endangered category if the negative factors affecting the population continue at their present rate. In 1975, the polar bear was placed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Appendix II includes species identified as *threatened*, or likely to become endangered if trade isn't regulated. International trade of polar bears, or their parts, is permitted with proper documentation issued by the government of the exporting country. Polar bears are protected under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The primary objective of the MMPA is to maintain the health and stability of the marine ecosystem and to obtain and maintain an optimum sustainable population of marine mammals. The MMPA prohibits taking and importing marine mammals unless a permit is issued for the purposes of public display, native subsistence, scientific research, or sustaining a depleted species. MMPA revisions in 1994 allow U.S. citizens to import polar bear "trophies" acquired in Canadian hunts. Polar bears in Alaska can be hunted only by Alaskan natives.

References: www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles
<http://animal.discovery.com>
<http://en.wikipedia.org>
www.msnbc.com

