



Bears in Mind - Fund for bears
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Polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*)



Polar bears are found in Siberia, Greenland, Canada and Alaska. The polar bear is very well adapted to living in the extreme Arctic conditions.

Origin

The polar bear is closely related to the Kodiak bear (a subspecies of the brown bear). The polar bear is the world's largest land predator.

Habitat

The polar bear lives in the coastal areas of the polar circle. Its preferred habitat is the pack ice along the coast and on the islands of the Arctic region. A single male can sometimes have a territory that spans 25,000 km². In the summer, polar bears are mainly found in tundra-like areas.

Appearance

In contrast with most brown bears, the body of a polar bear is more elongated and the limbs are short and solid. The paws are webbed, have wide, flat soles with fur between the pads and five large claws. This provides good traction on the slippery ice. Another striking feature is the small, narrow skull with a flat forehead and a long neck. The ears of a polar bear are small. Polar bear fur consists of a layer of short, dense under-fur and an outer layer of long, white guard hairs. Underneath the fur, the polar bear has an insulating layer of blubber. The skin of a polar bear is black, which helps absorb all the heat that comes in contact with the skin. The white, hollow guard hairs and the thick layer of blubber provide extra insulation. The polar bear uses its paws as paddles when hunting for prey under water. Since there is very little prey, the polar bear has developed an extremely good sense of smell for hunting. The body is streamlined and resembles a torpedo. Polar bears are therefore excellent swimmers and can remain under water for a few minutes. The nostrils are closed off while under water. This bear is very well equipped for life in the cold waters and on the ice floes of the Arctic Sea. With its white or yellow-white fur (only the nose is black), the polar bear completely blends into the landscape of snow and ice. The polar bear is however nothing more than a brown bear that adapted to life in the Arctic region during the Ice Age.

Hibernation

As a rule, the polar bear does not hibernate. A pregnant female however, digs a maternity den, a narrow tunnel of approximately 2 to 3 meters with a chamber at the end. While the female hibernates, falling snow will close off the entrance and thus erase her tracks.

Bears in Mind is door de Belastingdienst aangemerkt als algemeen nut beogende instelling. Dit maakt uw giften aan Bears in Mind aftrekbaar voor de inkomstenbelasting.



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<p>Size 240 - 300 cm length 160 cm height</p> <p>Sexual maturity Female: 5 years</p> <p>Number of litters Around 1 x per 3-4 years</p> <p>Lactation period 18 - 26 months</p>	<p>Weight Male: 400 – 650 kg. Female: 300 – 400 kg.</p> <p>Mating season April – June Period: 3 weeks</p> <p>Number of cubs 1 to 3</p>	<p>Lifespan In captivity: 40 years In the wild: 35 years</p> <p>Gestation period 8 – 9 months</p> <p>Weight at birth 450 – 600 gram</p>
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Diet

Unlike other bears the polar bear has teeth that are more like those of a predator. It is therefore no surprise that the polar bear's staple diet is carnivorous. They give preference to seals, especially the ringed seal, but also other kinds like the bearded seal, hooded seal and the harp seal. The polar bear uses a very specific hunting method to catch a seal. The polar bear waits in silence at a seal breathing hole. When the seal surfaces to breathe, the polar bear strikes and kills the seal. Polar bears will also track their prey under water, until they can get close enough to attack. They will also feed on walrus, small whales, sea birds and fish. If necessary, the polar bear will also eat smaller prey like arctic hare and lemming. The polar bear will occasionally eat carrion as well. Their excellent sense of smell enables them to track prey from far away. In the summer the polar bear feeds on willow leaves, berries, grass and moss. A hungry or irritated polar bear is known to attack humans.

Social behaviour

Polar bears generally live solitary lives, except during mating season. Occasionally they can be found in groups, often at food sources. They are quite tolerant of other polar bears, except when males compete for a female during mating season. The polar bear is active both during the day and night. They are extremely good swimmers and can swim for miles. A polar bear can dive down to a depth of a few meters, at a speed of 2 to 3 km/h. and stay down for up to 80 seconds. The polar bear is equally agile on land and is remarkably quick. On top of that, the polar bear has an extremely good sense of smell, perhaps even the best of all bears. When it catches the scent of prey, even if it is a few kilometres away, the polar bear will run in a straight line at a speed of up to 65 km/h for an extended period of time.

Status

The polar bear does not have any natural enemies; humans are their only enemy. According to the **IUCN-status**, the polar bear is '**Vulnerable**'. As a result of global warming, the population of polar bears is declining drastically and the future is not looking very bright. It is estimated that there are approximately 20,000 to 25,000 polar bears left worldwide.

Did you know?

- ... the Eskimos also call the polar bear 'nanook', long before the North Pole was discovered
- ... polar bears are the most dangerous of bears
- ... polar bears will consider eating anything that moves

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