

Polar Bears (*Ursus maritimus*)

- Polar bears are found in the wild within the circumpolar Arctic region, specifically in areas like Canada, Norway, Greenland, Russia and Alaska. Here, these carnivores are at the top of the food chain due to special adaptations that equip them for hunting upon sea ice and living in the freezing climate. These adaptations include:
 - Natural insulation comprised of up to 4 inches of blubber, darkly pigmented skin and dense underfur.
 - White guard hair, which camouflages polar bears, concealing them from seals—their prey of choice.
 - A keen sense of smell, which enables polar bears to locate holes in sea ice where seals breach for air.
 - Powerful jaws and claws for swift ambushes.
 - Paddle-like front paws propel polar bears through water; they can swim more than 60 miles in a single trip.
- Polar bears that have continuous access to sea ice are able to hunt throughout the entire calendar year. However, once summer comes and most of the frozen environment melts, polar bears feast off of stored fat reserves while foraging for vegetation and small prey when needed for several months while on main land. In recent years, sea ice is forming later in the fall and melting earlier in the spring due to climate change, making it more difficult for polar bears to hunt, rest and rear cubs.
- Arctic polar bears are listed as a vulnerable species by the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#), due to habitat loss caused by climate change.
- Another reason why sea ice is a necessity to this species' vitality: pregnant females build dens in snow drifts near sea ice in early autumn (September/October) to give birth.
- Births of cubs typically occur a few months later in late December or early January. Newborns then emerge from their dens around early March or late April. Arctic polar bears typically give birth to twin cubs. Births of singletons or triplets are less common. Mothers who have more fat stored in the fall will usually emerge with larger cubs come springtime, as they can provide more nutrition through nursing.
- Polar bears digest fat more efficiently than other species of bears, which is why they tend to be larger in stature. Males can weigh up to 1,000 pounds and females are typically half the size of males.
- The blubber layer of ringed, bearded, and harp seals is a primary staple in a polar bear's diet. When locally available during the ice-free season, a polar bear's diet also consists of fish, birds, vegetation and kelp.