



Polar Bear Care Demonstration: Enrichment

How to Use This Document

The following text is similar to what a presenter will say during a public demonstration. You may follow along, but please note that the exact wording and sequence will vary depending on staff and animal activity. Feel free to ask the presenter questions after the program. Thank you for joining us today!

***Note:** Animal Care staff may provide enrichment in different parts of Walter Family Arctic Tundra. Check with zoo personnel to find out where the demonstration will be.

Pre-Demonstration Announcement

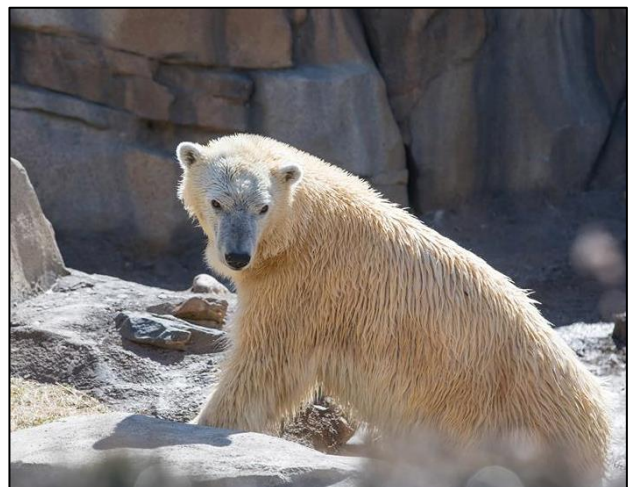
Hello! In a few minutes, Animal Care staff will add some enrichment to the polar bear habitat. If you are interested in learning more, please find a comfortable spot at least one tile space away from the viewing window. You may take a seat at the front or stand behind the people who are already seated. The demonstration will start shortly and will last five to ten minutes. If you have any questions before we begin, please let me know.

Introduction

Welcome to Walter Family Arctic Tundra at Lincoln Park Zoo! My name is _____, and I'm with the Learning Team. Today, Animal Care staff are offering enrichment to the polar bears. Enrichment is anything that allows animals to practice natural behaviors. Some common polar bear

behaviors are related to hunting, such as sniffing, biting, pouncing, and swimming. By observing those behaviors, you will learn how polar bears dominate and depend on the Arctic.

There are two polar bears at Lincoln Park Zoo, Siku and Talini. Depending on which bear has access to which part of the habitat today, you might see either or both of them.



Siku (left) is a male polar bear born in 2009 at Toledo Zoo and Aquarium. **Talini** (right) is a female born at Detroit Zoo in 2004. One of the easiest way to tell them apart is size. Male polar bears, like Siku, are much larger than females, like Talini.

Enrichment is a daily part of animal care that provides choice and variety. Some types of enrichment are built into the habitat, such as the varied landscape features in this area. The enrichment the polar bears are about to receive is a temporary addition. On some days they get a big, meaty bone, or some kind of container with food inside, or a heavy-duty object to manipulate.

Whether enrichment is permanent or added, it's always up to the animal whether or not to engage with it. We want the polar bears to experience choice. They might not be interested in today's enrichment. If they are interested, they might lose interest and choose to do something else. That's fine. Our Animal Care staff carefully select types of enrichment that will appeal to polar bears and draw out certain behaviors, but ultimately what they do is their choice.

Arctic Adaptations

Enrichment can make some behaviors and physical traits more noticeable, so enrichment sessions are a great time to talk about how polar bears are adapted for Arctic life. The average temperature in winter is 22 degrees below zero in the Arctic, with lows sometimes reaching 60 below. The freezing cold is often accompanied by fierce winds. But in the summer, the Arctic is more mild. At the southern edge of their range, polar bears sometimes experience summer days in the 70s. Their bodies are adapted for swimming and hunting in the summer and staying warm in the extreme winters. Thick fur prevents wind and snow from reaching a polar bear's skin, while a 4½-inch-thick layer of blubber just beneath their skin keeps them from losing their core body heat. Together, the fur and blubber maintain a body temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the same as ours!

Hunting

Polar bears are the world's largest land-based carnivore. A male standing upright on his hind legs can be eight to ten feet tall. Females are only slightly smaller, measuring six to eight feet tall when standing upright. Male polar bears weigh between 775 and 1,300 pounds, while female polar bears weigh between 330 and 650 pounds.

You might notice that polar bears have sharp, widely spaced canine teeth. These teeth help polar bears catch and hold seals, their most common prey in nature. At the zoo, polar bears don't eat seals. Instead, they receive a veterinarian-approved diet of meat, fish, eggs, and even vegetables. It doesn't get as cold here as it does in the Arctic, so polar bears living in Chicago don't need the same high-fat diet of seals that wild polar bears must consume to build up a thick layer of blubber.



Polar bears have very large paws with huge, sharp claws to help them hunt. Their paws are eight to twelve inches across, larger than any



other animal's paw. That's the same as a dinner plate! Wide paws help polar bears swim, and the width also distributes their weight so their feet don't break through ice. Polar bears need to walk on sea ice at the ocean surface to stalk seals. Since polar bears cannot swim as fast as seals, they cannot catch them in a chase. Stalking and grabbing is the best way for them to hunt. When seals come up to take a breath through holes in the ice, polar bears pull them out of the water with their strong claws and teeth.

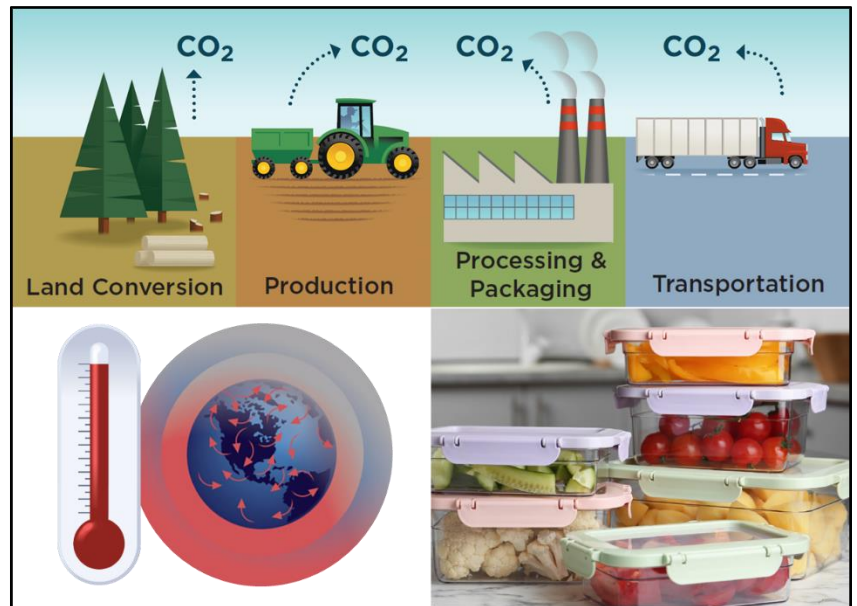
In a normal year, some sea ice remains in the Arctic through the summer months. Thicker sea ice forms in the

fall and winter then melts back to seawater in the late spring. Polar bears do most of their eating for the year when the sea ice is thick. But climate change leads to Arctic sea ice forming later and melting earlier every year.

Climate Change

What makes polar bears strong in the Arctic also makes them vulnerable to the effects of climate change. We release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere whenever we burn fossil fuels, like coal and gasoline. Rampant carbon dioxide builds up in the atmosphere, acting like a thick blanket that traps heat around the world and disrupts the climate. This blanket of carbon dioxide is already causing average temperatures in the Arctic to increase. As the Arctic gets warmer, the sea ice season becomes shorter. That makes it more difficult for polar bears to hunt enough seals to survive. If warming around the world continues at the present rate, polar bears may not have a place to call home in the future.

Before it's too late, we have to protect the Arctic and the animals that live there. One thing that can help is reducing food waste. It takes a lot of energy to produce food and get it to the people who eat it, and most of that energy comes from burning fossil fuels. But in the United States, about a third of all the food produced goes uneaten. That means we're using more energy than we need to. By doing things that reduce food waste—like storing and using leftovers—you can help slow down climate change and preserve the Arctic for future generations.



Conclusion

The polar bears might continue to enjoy their enrichment, but I'm going to turn off my microphone. I encourage you to keep exploring Walter Family Arctic Tundra. There are other viewing points where you might be able to observe

the bears. I will be staying for a couple minutes to answer any questions you have. I hope you've enjoyed learning about enrichment, polar bears, and the Arctic. Once again, my name is _____, and I'm with the Learning team. Please find me if you have any questions. Thanks for being here! Your support helps us conserve wildlife.