



Common Name: Polar Bear
Scientific Name: *Ursus maritimus*

Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Ursidae

Range: Found in Greenland, Norway, the former Soviet Union, Canada and Alaska.

Habitat: Polar bears are found in areas of annual ice that forms around the shorelines of the continents and archipelagos at the circumpolar Arctic.

Life Span in the Wild: The average age is 9 to 10 years. Males have a higher mortality than females, probably because of competition for females and the resulting injuries. There is a small group that lives to 15 to 18 years.

Life Span in Captivity: mid to late 30s—currently a bear in Winnipeg is over 40.

Height/Length: over 8 feet; newborns are 12 to 14 inches long.

Weight: Males 500 to 1500 pounds; Females 330 to 600 pounds (not pregnant); Newborn cubs weigh only 1 to 1 ½ pounds, but grow rapidly.

Gestation: Polar bears mate between February and May with delayed implantation occurring in September or October. Cubs are born about January.

Number of Young: 1 to 2 cubs is most common, but 3 can occur occasionally.

Diet in the Wild: Polar bears are carnivores, feeding on ringed seals, bearded seals, young walrus and occasionally a narwhal or beluga. They have been known to eat carrion and may occasionally eat berries and other plant material. Pregnant females will not eat or drink while denning, which may last from 4-8 months.

Diet in Captivity: Mainly fish (herring, capelin and trout) and dry dog food, In addition to a carnivore diet, they are fed some fruit, especially apples and grapes. Amounts and composition vary with the seasons, the average is between 12-20 pounds a day.

Activity Period: Diurnal

Social Structure: Solitary except for family groups consisting of mother and cubs. Polar bears have a large home range but do not defend particular territories. At sites of particular food abundance, several bears may feed in close proximity but with little interaction.

Sense Emphasis: Sense of smell is superb, sight very good.

Miscellaneous Information:

- Distinctive all white coat, triangular profile, long neck and small ears. The nose, lips and skin under the fur is black. The hairs on the bears' body are hollow and reflect light, giving bears their distinctive white appearance.

- The heavy, dense under-fur and layer of blubber (up to 4 ½ inches thick) allow them to maintain a normal body temperature, even when the outside temperature drops to -37° C (-34.6° F)
- The soles of polar bears' feet are covered with vacuoles that act as suction cups when traveling on ice.
- Sometimes known as the “sea bear,” polar bears are excellent swimmers. Their long neck and small head provide a torpedo shape for moving through the water. Their slightly webbed front feet are used as paddles, while their hind feet act as rudders when they're swimming.
- Polar bears have good underwater vision. Because their fat is very buoyant, they have been known to swim 60 miles without rest.
- Polar bears have no natural enemies, although they do on rare occasions attack one another. They are also hunted by humans at an unsustainable rate. Climate change is currently the most serious threat they face.
- Male polar bears do not hibernate; pregnant females dig snow dens, where they remain for months after giving birth.
- Cubs' eyes open at around 30 days, and their first canine teeth appear at about 50 days.
- At 2 to 3 months cubs are ready for their first unsteady walking and ventures outside their den.
- Cubs stay with their mother for 2 ½ to 3 years.
- Polar bears are considered sub-adults until they reach sexual maturity, which occurs at 4-5 years for females and 6-7 years for males.
- Polar bears are currently listed as “Threatened” and are the only bear species with international protection.

Collection notes:

Nan	female, age 11. Gave birth to one male cub on 11-21-06
Crystal	female, age 8. Gave birth to two female cubs on 11-25-06
Marty	male, age 10. Father of all three cubs. Scheduled to be sent to Pittsburgh Zoo May 2007.

References:

Stirling, Ian. Polar Bears.
 AZA Bear TAG Fact Sheet
 Polar Bears International