

Polar Bear

Scientific Name: *Ursus maritimus*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Ursidae



The seemingly "white" coat consists of hollow hair with no pigment. It only appears white by reflecting visible light. Its transparency allows sunlight to penetrate the bear's black skin which can absorb heat. For further protection the polar bear has a 3-4 inch layer of fat on his back, thighs, and buttocks. Hair on the soles of the feet provide insulation, traction and silence. The polar bear's build is less robust than that of the closely related brown bear with a more elongated neck and head. They are 8-11 ft. long and weigh 700-1400 lbs. with the males considerably larger. The most carnivorous of North American bears, the polar bear is a solitary, unsocial hunter capable of consuming 15-50 lbs. of food in one meal. With excellent senses of hearing, sight and smell (up to 20 miles), this animal in his frozen arctic habitat stands at the top of the food chain. Polar bears possess tremendous strength and dexterity. They are able to pry food from kelp stems as well as knock out a beluga whale; quick enough to snatch lemming from the grass or strong enough to flip a 400 lb. seal into the air. And, of course, they are excellent swimmers, often found 100 miles at sea.

Range

Northern Europe, Canada, Alaska, Greenland

Habitat

Areas of annual ice that forms around shorelines of the continents and archipelagoes at the circumpolar Arctic.

Gestation

195-265 days

Litter

1-4

Behavior

The most carnivorous of North American bears, the polar bear is a solitary, unsocial hunter capable of consuming 15-50 lbs. of food in one meal. With excellent senses of hearing, sight and smell (up to 20 miles), this animal in his frozen arctic habitat stands at the top of the food chain. They are able to pry food from kelp stems as well as knock out a beluga whale; quick enough to snatch lemming from the grass or strong enough to flip a 400 lb. seal into the air. And, of course, they are excellent swimmers, often found 100 miles at sea.

Reproduction

North American bears usually mate in the spring and the female's den in the fall. If the female is in peak condition (with enough stored fat) when she goes into her winter den, the embryo will start to develop. If the female is not in peak condition, her body will reabsorb the embryo and not give birth that year. Cubs are 12 to 14 inches long and weigh a mere 21-25 oz. at birth. By the time the new family leaves the den in March or April the cubs, sustained in the interval on mother's milk (31% rich in fat), weigh about 25 lbs. Cubs will remain with their mother for up to two and a half years.

Wild Diet

Blubber (not meat) of arctic ringed seals, arctic fox, narwhal, birds' eggs, carrion, berries, bearded, spotted and ribbon seals