



Polar Bears in Trouble



photos courtesy U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The beautiful, powerful polar bear is in danger. Polar bears spend most of their lives on floating ice in the sea. But that ice is melting, and polar bears have nowhere else to go.

Since 2008, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has listed polar bears as “threatened” to give more protection to them and their habitat.

Habitat

Polar bears can live only in places where the sea is covered with ice most of the year. They use the ice to access their main food, seals. Their home is in the north, the Arctic.

There are about 20,000 to 25,000 polar bears in the world. More than two-thirds of them live in North America. There are five countries that have polar bears: the United States (northern Alaska), Canada, Greenland, Norway and Russia.

Many polar bears stay on sea ice all year, spending only short periods on land. Scientists say there has been more ice loss than normal in the last 30 years. In the last decade, the melting has sped up even more.

Polar bear bodies

Polar bears are totally adapted for life in Arctic areas. They are better suited for swimming or walking on the ice than for walking on land.

They depend on the huge number of calories provided from the fat of the seals they eat. Land animals do not provide enough calories to keep polar bears alive.

Mother bears start coming out of their dens to hunt around March. They have been living on their body fat and may not have had anything to eat for about eight months. They need food fast to survive and help their cubs. If there is not enough nearby ice, the mother may have to swim to new areas, which can be dangerous for tiny cubs.



The importance of ice

In Alaska, bears do much of their hunting from ice close to, or attached to, the shoreline. Now, however, much of the ice is far from land. It can be 200 miles out during the summer. Polar bears are good swimmers, but they cannot swim endlessly or in high waves for very long. If they swim too long, they could drown before reaching the next ice floe.

In one of the main polar bear habitats in Canada, scientists have found that ice is melting four weeks earlier than it did 30 years ago. This means there is less time for bears to hunt seals. They are not getting enough to eat. Bears in this area have been losing weight they need.

An uncertain future

Most experts believe climate change is the reason polar bears are in trouble. A small population of polar bears will probably survive into 2100, but they will completely disappear if we lose all the sea ice. Luckily, we have the power to change this.

Helping polar bears

Experts say people can do a lot to change things for the better. People have saved other animals in danger in the past.

Much of our energy comes from fossil fuels such as oil and gas. When these fuels are burned by cars or in buildings, they give off **carbon dioxide**. Carbon dioxide acts like a blanket, trapping heat around our planet, disrupting the climate and melting Arctic sea ice.

Here are some things you can do to help the polar bears and other animals right now:

- Start a **no idling** campaign at your school. Ask parents to turn off their cars while they wait to pick you up.
- Organize your classmates to **bike to school**.
- Write a letter to your congressional representatives to let them know you care about polar bears and people too. A heartfelt letter from a kid can have a big impact, and letters from lots of kids would have an even bigger impact!
- **Talk!** Share what you've learned by talking to friends, family and local businesses about how we can all make a difference outside our own households and influence decisions on where our energy comes from.

Photo courtesy Utah Department of Environmental Quality



Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPpolarbears
- bit.ly/MPhelpbears

At the library:

- “Polar Bear: Shrinking Ice” by Stephen Person

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of polar bears are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



ADAPTED, ARCTIC, BEAR, BIKE, CHANGE, CLIMATE, CUBS, DEN, FAT, FLOE, FOSSIL, FUEL, HABITAT, HUNT, ICE, IDLING, LAND, LOSS, POLAR, SEALS, SWIM, THREATENED, WRITE.

S W R I T E L A N D U L G B O
S L L C B J G P O L A R T J S
R W A C H D E N E T A E R H T
A T I E I A X L I U H U N T L
E C L M S T N E X L K S B U C
B F O F A E C G K C D Y L N A
H I S F Q T X R E I F I C E
G W S T A T I B A H B L E U F
A D A P T E D K L I S S O F O
N B H C L I M A T E D E N E E

Cook's Corner

Healthy Chocolate Mousse

You'll need:

- 2 avocados (fresh-ripe, not mushy)
- 1/4 cup water or vegan milk
- 1/3 cup cacao powder

- 1/3 cup agave
- a few drops vanilla extract (optional)



What to do:

1. Scoop out avocado into blender or food processor, discarding pit. Add liquid, giving it a quick whirl on low, then add other ingredients.
2. Blend everything on low. Repeat until super smooth.
3. Scoop into a container and chill before serving. Serve with berries or sprinkled with shredded coconut or crushed nuts. Serves 4 to 6.

Adapted from "The Help Yourself Cookbook for Kids" by Ruby Roth with permission from Andrews McMeel Publishing (andrewsmcmeel.com).

* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

7 Little Words for Kids

Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

1. “The Lego Movie” character (9) _____
2. bug with hard wings (6) _____
3. it covers the house (4) _____
4. seaside (5) _____
5. what an Olympic winner gets (5) _____
6. making your body work (8) _____
7. unable to do things yourself (8) _____

TLE	ST	AL	WYL
MED	RO	CISE	BEE
DST	EXER	SS	PLE
HEL	COA	YLE	OF

Answers: Wylidstyle, beetle, medal, coast, roof, coast, beetle, helpless.



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Mini Jokes



Paul: What do polar bears eat for lunch?
Penny: Ice-bergers!

Eco Note



Usually when solids form, atoms get closer together to form something denser. This is why most solids sink in water. But solid water, or ice, is actually less dense. Water molecules form rings when water freezes. All that space makes ice less dense, so it floats. Ice floating on top of a body of water lets the rest of it stay liquid. If ice sank, whole oceans could freeze solid!

adapted from climatekids.nasa.gov

Thank You



The Mini Page thanks Marissa Krouse, program manager for Polar Bears International, for help with this issue.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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