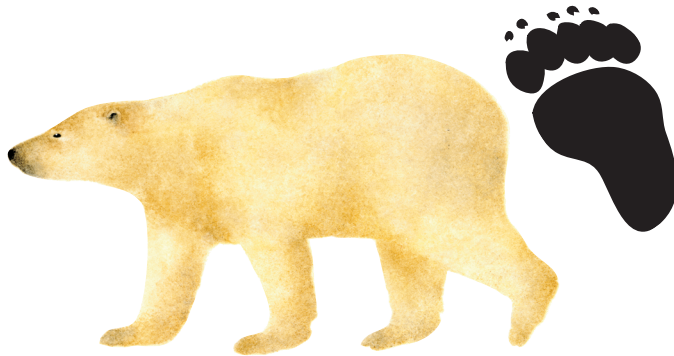




POLAR BEAR

Ursus maritimus



Appearance

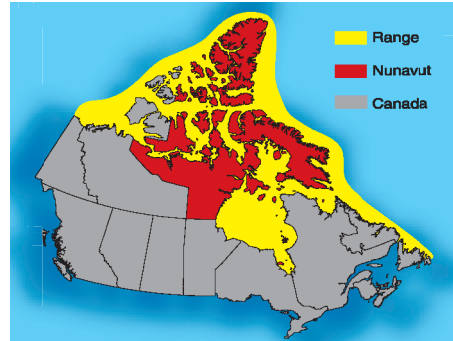
The polar bear is the largest of all bears. Its body, neck and head are much longer than those of other bears. The polar bear is completely covered with fur, with the exception of its nose and the pads of its feet. The coat can vary from pure white to a creamy yellow depending on the time of year and the angle of light. The males weigh between 350 to over 650kg and females normally weigh between 150 and 250kg although this can double when they are pregnant.

Food And Feeding

Polar bear's feed mainly on ringed seals but also hunt bearded, harp and hooded seals as well as young walrus. Sometimes, large males capture beluga whales. In addition, they may eat seabirds, eggs, and carcasses of stranded marine mammals, fish, mussels, crabs, grasses, seaweed, mosses and sedge if they come upon them, but they do not generally hunt or look for these foods.

Behaviour

Polar bears are skilled hunters. They use their powerful jaws and paws to capture seals and drag them out of the water. In the spring female polar bears usually consume the entire seal with the exception of the skull, larger bones of the skeleton and flippers. Single mature males, on the other hand, are more likely to feed on the fat of a seal, and leave the rest on the ice. Polar bears are well known for their excellent swimming ability. During their travels, they swim across bays and wide leads without trouble and during the summer, they may spend hours in the water for no apparent reason. Unlike black bears and grizzly bears, polar bears do not hibernate. However, pregnant polar bears enter dens during the winter to give birth. All polar bears may dig temporary dens to escape cold or stormy weath-



er. If a polar bear does not feed for about 10 days, its body changes into a hibernation state with a lowered metabolic rate and body temperature.

Range

The polar bear can be found throughout Nunavut, mainly close to the coastline but some animals may travel many kilometers inland to den or simply to cross islands and get to other hunting areas.

Habitat

Polar bears can be found on the annual ice throughout the circum-polar arctic. The seasons, availability of food and good denning sites, sea-ice conditions and breeding season are all factors which affect where polar bears may be found. In Canada, they have been seen as far as 88° north and as far south as the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, although these are extremes and few bears actually reach those locations.

Reproduction

Males and females mate in the spring but the fertilized egg remains undeveloped until autumn when it implants itself and begins to grow. The cubs are born 2 months later. The female will excavate a den and, in early January, give birth to a litter of cubs. Twins are most common, but often a single cub is born in first pregnancies. Litters of 3 and even 4 have been recorded. The first few weeks following birth are spent in the den, feeding, sleeping and gaining weight and strength. In early spring the cubs leave the den with their mother and shortly after they begin the journey to the sea-ice. The mother hunts and although the cubs begin to eat fat and meat they generally continue to nurse until they are almost 2 years old. Cubs will stay with their mother until they are 2.5 years old.

Status Survival and Management

According to the Nunavut Wild Species 2000 report, the status of polar bears in Nunavut is currently sensitive. Polar bears live between 20 to 35 years in the wild and up to 40 years in captivity.

