

# **Polar bears would not tolerate longer summers**

CE Noticias Financieras English

February 13, 2024 Tuesday

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**Length:** 462 words

**Body**

***Polar bears*** are unlikely to adapt to longer summers. More time stranded on land will mean more risk of starvation for these iconic Arctic animals.

It has been speculated that ***polar bears*** may adapt to longer ice-free seasons due to global warming by acting like their relatives the grizzly ***bears***:

**resting or eating dry land food. To analyze this question,** 20 ***polar bears*** were monitored for three weeks during the summer.

They saw how they tried different strategies to maintain energy reserves, including resting, scavenging and foraging. However, almost all of them lost weight rapidly: on average about one kilogram per day. "***Polar bears*** are not brown ***bears*** in white coats. They are very, very different," the researchers note in a statement.

Nevertheless, adult male ***polar bears*** can reach 3.3 meters long and weigh 1,499 pounds compared to the 2.70 meters and 793 pounds of grizzly ***bears***. To maintain that large mass, ***polar bears* rely on energy-rich seal blubber, which they capture best on the ice**.

Little is known about the energy expenditure and behavior of ***polar bears*** when they are confined to land, so researchers used video camera collars and GPS to track ***polar bears*** summering in the western Hudson Bay region of Manitoba, Canada.

They wanted to see what the specialized ice hunters ate and did during the long time they stayed on land when their preferred prey, **seals, was out of reach**. The researchers also weighed the ***bears*** before and after the observation period and measured their energy expenditure.

Many of the adult male ***polar bears*** simply lay down to conserve energy, burning calories at a rate similar to hibernation. Others actively foraged and consumed bird and caribou carcasses, as well as berries, seaweed and grasses.

In all, the researchers found a fivefold range in energy expenditure from an adult male resting 98% of the time to the most active foraging 205 miles.

**Some adult females spent up to 40% of their time foraging.** However, all that activity did not pay off. Terrestrial foods gave them some energetic benefit, but ultimately, the ***bears*** had to expend more energy to access those resources.

The study focused on the southernmost extent of ***polar bear*** range in western Hudson Bay, where climate warming is likely affecting ***bears*** at a faster rate than other Arctic regions.

**The *polar bear* population in the area has already declined by approximately 30% since 1987.** This study indicates that ***polar bears*** throughout the Arctic are at risk of starvation as the ice-free period continues to grow.

Moreover, the researchers point out that as ***polar bears*** are forced to come ashore earlier, the period in which they normally acquire most of the energy they need to survive is reduced. All this leads to think that longer summers will endanger this species.

**Load-Date:** February 15, 2024

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