

# **Polar bears' agonizing extinction; long arctic summers eating carrion and berries**

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**Body**

***Polar bears*** are disappearing, their habitat is crumbling with climate change. The ice that is critical for their food, seals, is lasting less and less. Research from Washington State University published in the journal **Nature Communications** reveals the ability of ***polar bears*** to feed on land and survive. That is, they have studied their ability to adapt to a world without ice and scientists do not believe they will succeed.

The disappearance of the Arctic ice sheet is gradual and steady, and it is believed that it may disappear completely by 2030. It was hoped that ***polar bears*** could adapt to the long summers brought on by climate change by behaving like grizzly ***bears***, resting or eating terrestrial food. In this research, they followed the steps of 20 ***polar bears*** with cameras attached to their bodies and observed that they tried these adaptive behaviors, that is, they ate what they could on land and rested, but their energy expenditure was not supplied by the caloric intake they need.

"Neither strategy will allow ***polar bears*** to exist on land beyond a certain time," concludes Charles Robbins, director of the Washington State University ***Bear*** Center and co-author of the study: "***Polar bears*** are not grizzly ***bears***, but ***polar bears***. They are not brown ***bears*** in white coats. They are very, very different."

An adult male ***polar bear*** can reach three meters in length and weigh 1,500 kilos and a brown ***bear*** 800 kilos and two meters. To keep that body well fed, it needs the fat provided by the seals.

"The ***polar bear*** is a species listed as vulnerable and is an icon of climate change," explains **Laura Moreno, head of WWF's species program**. "The ***bear*** needs the ice to hunt the seals and the thaw is now occurring earlier and forming later." According to WWF there are about 31,000 ***polar bears*** and they are at risk from advancing climate change. "***Bears*** can survive temporarily, but their risk of starvation increases with the disappearance of ice as this period of stress becomes longer and longer." Moreno is clear: "Their habitat is disappearing. In the long term the ***polar bear*** is going extinct."

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***Polar bears* eating carrion and berries.**

"We found a real diversity of ***bear*** behaviors and, as a result, observed a diverse range of energetic expenditures," says lead author **Anthony Pagano, a biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey's *Polar Bear* Research Program**.

The study reports that many of the adult male ***polar bears*** simply lay down to conserve energy, burning calories at a rate similar to hibernation. Other ***bears*** actively foraged for food, consuming bird and caribou carcasses, as well as berries, algae and grasses.

In total, the researchers observed a five-fold increase in energy expenditure, from an adult male resting 98% of the time to the most active, which traveled 330 kilometers. Some adult females spent up to 40% of their time foraging. However, all that activity did not pay off.

"As ***polar bears*** are forced to set foot on land earlier [because of melting ice], the period when they normally acquire most of the energy they need to survive is reduced," Pagano said. "With increased land use, the expectation is that we are likely to see increases in starvation, particularly with adolescents and females with cubs," he adds.

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