

# **Famine threatens polar bears' lives as Arctic glaciers melt**

CE Noticias Financieras English

February 13, 2024 Tuesday

Copyright 2024 Content Engine, LLC.

All Rights Reserved

Copyright 2024 CE Noticias Financieras All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 788 words

**Body**

Some ***polar bears*** face starvation as the Arctic sea ice melts. This is because they are unable to adapt their diets to life on land, scientists have discovered.

The iconic Arctic species normally feeds on ringed seals that they catch on ice floes in the sea.

But as the ice disappears in a warming world, many ***bears*** are spending more time on land, eating birds' eggs, berries and grass.

But the animals lose weight quickly on land, increasing the risk of death.

The ***polar bear*** has become an example of the growing threat of climate change in the Arctic, but the reality of the impact on this species is complex.

Although ***bear*** numbers plummeted until the 1980s, this was mainly due to predatory hunting.

With greater legal protection, ***polar bear*** numbers have increased. But rising global temperatures are now seen as the biggest threat.

This is because the frozen seas of the Arctic are essential for their survival.

The animals use the sea ice as a platform to hunt ringed seals, which have high concentrations of fat, especially in late spring and early summer.

But during the warmer months, many parts of the Arctic are now increasingly ice-free.

Other researchers, however, say that the effect of climate change on ***polar bears*** will depend on location (read more below).

In the western Canadian province of Manitoba, where this study was carried out, between 1979 and 2015 the ice-free period in the region rose to up to three weeks.

To understand how the animals survive as the ice disappears, the researchers followed the activities of 20 ***polar bears*** during the summer months over a three-year period.

As well as taking blood samples and weighing the ***bears***, the animals were fitted with GPS-equipped collars and video cameras.

This allowed the scientists to record the animals' movements, their activities and what they ate.

During the ice-free summer months, the ***bears*** adopted different strategies to survive, with some essentially resting and conserving energy.

Most tried to search for vegetation or berries or swam to see if they could find food.

Both approaches failed, with 19 of the 20 ***bears*** in the study having lost body mass, by up to 11% in some cases.

On average, the animals lost one kilo a day.

"Regardless of which strategy they tried, there was no real benefit to either approach in terms of their ability to extend the period in which they could survive on land," according to lead author Anthony Pagano of the US Geological Survey in Alaska.

"***Polar bears*** are not grizzly ***bears*** wearing white lab coats," says co-author Charles Robbins of the Washington State University ***Bear*** Center.

"They are very, very different."

Two of the three ***bears*** that went into the water found dead animal carcasses, but spent little time eating as they were too tired from the effort.

"A sub-adult female found a dead beluga whale, took a few bites out of it, but mainly used it as a buoy to rest on," Pagano told BBC News.

"This really suggests to us that these ***bears*** can't eat and swim at the same time."

**Key facts about *polar bears***

There are around 26,000 ***polar bears*** left in the world, mostly in Canada. Populations are also found in the USA, Russia, Greenland and Norway.

***Polar bears*** are listed as vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with climate change being a key factor in their decline.

Adult males can reach around 3 meters in length and weigh around 600 kg.

***Polar bears*** can eat up to 45 kg of fat in one sitting.

These ***bears*** have a powerful sense of smell and can sniff out prey up to 16 km away.

They are great swimmers and have been spotted up to 100 km away from the coast, being able to swim at speeds of around 10 km per hour, partly due to their slightly webbed paws.

An intriguing finding of the study was that one ***bear*** gained 32 kg in weight.

The researchers believe that this ***bear***, which spent much of its time resting and conserving its strength, was lucky enough to stumble across an animal carcass.

While previous research has outlined the challenges posed by the climate in the coming decades, this new work raises important questions about species' ability to adapt.

However, other researchers claim that the impacts of climate change on ***polar bears*** would be different depending on the location.

"***Polar bears*** are likely to disappear from areas where sea ice will be lost in the future, but it is difficult to say when and where," says Jon Aars, from the Norwegian ***Polar*** Institute, who was not involved in the study.

"Some areas will also have good conditions for ***bears*** many decades from now."

"The area of this study is one where conditions could be very difficult for ***bears*** in the near future, if the sea ice continues to disappear as predicted."

The study was published in Nature Communications.

**Load-Date:** February 14, 2024

**End of Document**