

# **Polar bears can't survive on climate change diet**

Waterloo Region Record (Ontario)

February 17, 2024 Saturday

First Edition

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**Section:** CANADA / WORLD; Pg. B4

**Length:** 500 words

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**Body**

For ***polar bears***, the climate change diet is a losing proposition, a new study suggests.

With Arctic sea ice shrinking from climate change, many ***polar bears*** have to shift their diets to land during parts of the summer. A study looking at Hudson Bay ***polar bears*** tries to figure out if they can keep up their roly-poly figure, which is what's needed and found that an overwhelming number of them are dropping the pounds no matter what they do to try to beef up their weight.

Some ***bears*** find a lot of food - berries, eggs, sea birds and even caribou antlers - but it takes so much effort, so many calories are burned trying to eat, that they end up losing weight and expending more energy than they take in, according to a study in Tuesday's journal Nature Communications.

Other ***bears*** go into a stage of semi-hibernation, don't do much, but they also shed the pounds, so either way doesn't work, said study lead author Anthony Pagano, a U.S. Geological Survey wildlife biologist.

Researchers found that 19 of the 20 ***bears*** studied dropped an average of 21 kilograms over three weeks of being studied in research that monitored their calorie intake, energy use and respiration in the wild.

***Polar bears*** try to keep up their weight in the summer after a spring when they feast and fatten prodigiously. In the area of the Hudson Bay where researchers studied, lack of sea ice has meant ***polar bears*** are on land three weeks longer than in the 1980s, Pagano said.

Usually ***polar bears*** eat high-fat seals while based on sea ice, near where the seals are. It's especially good hunting in the spring when seal pups are weaning and easy pickings for ***polar bears*** before they learn to swim away from the ice base, Pagano said.

Last September, when Arctic sea ice hit its annual low in September, there was about 2.6 million square kilometers less of sea ice than the same time in 1979, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Center.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service lists ***polar bears*** as a threatened species "due to the loss of its sea ice habitat."

"This paper clearly shows that ***polar bears*** cannot adapt to the pace of change in the Arctic and that the ***bears*** are already using everything they have to stay alive," said University of Alberta biologist Andrew Derocher, who wasn't part of the research, but called it profoundly elegant and insightful.

"This is concerning because of course it really does raise the question of when will the individual ***bears*** run out of energy," Derocher said. While research shows that some of the ***bears*** will be OK, "other ***bears*** were basically right on the edge of where they would potentially suffer from starvation and subsequent death."

Overall, it shows that it's unlikely ***polar bears*** can adapt to living on land, Derocher said.

When ***polar bears*** have sea ice, they feast on seals. Not just the seals, but their fat. About 70 per cent of the ***polar bear*** diet while on ice is fat, said study co-author Karyn Rode, a USGS wildlife biologist.

The Associated Press

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