

# **‘Wonderful experience’: Researcher’s close encounter with Svalbard polar bears**

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**Byline:** Miranda Bryant in Stockholm

**Highlight:** Meteorologist says ***bears*** were not aggressive but they fired signal gun to scare them away

**Body**

Katarzyna Kudlacz was preparing a breakfast of scrambled eggs at a research station on Svalbard when she looked up to see she had three unexpected guests.

Shocked and in awe, the meteorologist immediately alerted her colleagues to the female ***polar bear*** and her two cubs peering into the Polish research station in Hornsund , in the south of the Norwegian archipelago, their noses pressed up against the window.

Her photographs of the close encounter show one of the ***bears*** with their paw on the window, board games in the foreground.

“That day I was on duty, the so-called station duty, when one person is in charge of the station, keeping an eye on the satellite radio, cooking or cleaning,” said Kudlacz, who has been based at the station since June.

“While preparing breakfast, I saw from the kitchen our majestic guests looking with interest at the windows.”

The family looked healthy, she said, and “only looked at our windows with interest”, but the team decided to fire a flare gun to frighten the ***bears*** away.

“It was a wonderful experience, but we must remember that they are wild animals and for them and for us it is better to keep our distance. They were not aggressive. However we preferred, by making noise and firing a signal gun, to scare them away.”

Daniel Kepski, the leader of the 46th Polish ***polar*** expedition, said they often saw ***polar bears***, but the animals rarely stopped to look inside the research station. “It was amazing to see them so close during that day, but of course it was also a bit stressful.”

This year year the team had seen more ***polar bears*** than usual, he added. Usually there were around 20 ***bear*** sightings a year, but this year there had been close to 40 sightings since June and they expected to see more in their final three months.

“So far, we have not observed any clearly emaciated individuals. This year is probably a good year for Svalbard’s ***polar bears*** because there is a lot of sea ice here compared to recent years,” he said.

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