



FAST FACTS

Name: Polar bear

Species name: *Ursus maritimus*

Average weight: 400 - 600 kg (males)
150 - 250 kg (females)

Life expectancy: approximately 25 years

PHYSIOLOGY

The polar bear's Latin name, *ursus maritimus*, means "sea bear." It is the only bear that is considered a marine mammal because it depends upon the marine environment for survival. It is the largest land carnivore in North America.

The polar bear is adapted to life in the extremes of the Arctic. Its distinctive coat acts as camouflage in the snow and ice and it uses this camouflage to hide from the threat of human hunters as well as in stalking and hunting seals. The thick fur has glossy guard hairs and a dense layer of underfur over a thick layer of fat beneath its skin, which helps keep it warm. The soles of the polar bear's feet have small bumps and cavities that provide suction and prevent it from slipping on the icy terrain.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

The polar bear lives in the Arctic terrain in vast areas of ice surrounding open water. It uses the ice as a platform to hunt its favorite food, ringed seals, which are a type of seal commonly found in the Arctic. A polar bear uses its sense of smell for hunting and can detect a seal's breathing hole in the ice from up to a kilometre away. It will also hunt other types of seals and occasionally walrus, belugas and narwhals.

Polar bears are excellent swimmers. The bear's layer of fat allows it to stay warm in the frigid Arctic waters and also helps it remain afloat. It uses its powerful front paws as oars and allow its rear paws to trail behind and act as rudders. Polar bear's have been known to swim up to 10 kilometres per hour and for more than 90 kilometres without a rest. It can hold its breath underwater for more than a minute.

RANGE

The polar bear population is estimated to be between 25,000 and 40,000 worldwide, with approximately 13,000 to 15,000 living in Canada.

In Canada, polar bears can be found from James Bay to northern Ellesmere Island, and from Labrador to the Alaskan border. Churchill, Manitoba, on the western coast of Hudson Bay, is one of the three largest polar bear maternity denning areas in the world.