

Polar Bear

Ursus maritimus (Davis Strait Population)

STATUS	Not Listed 	Vulnerable 
Special Concern 	Not Listed 	Not Listed 



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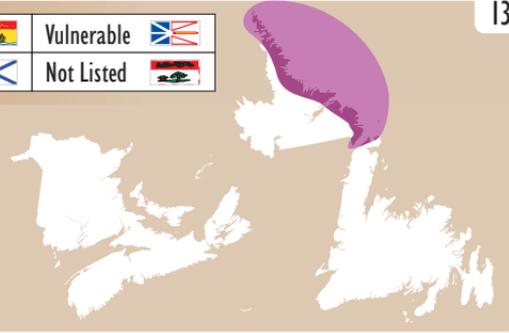
Species Description

The Polar Bear is generally considered the earth's largest member of the Ursidae (bear) family. Their translucent fur appears white, or sometimes off-white or yellowish. A male can reach 3 m in length and a shoulder height of up to 1.3 m; females are smaller and can reach lengths of 2.5 m. Polar Bears also lack the characteristic shoulder hump, large dish-shaped head, and shorter neck of the Brown (Grizzly) Bear.



© DND

Population along Labrador and occasionally northern Newfoundland coast probably numbers in the hundreds. Total Canadian population is about 15,000.



Habitat

Polar Bears are found along coasts and on sea ice where there are sufficient populations of ice-dependent seals, especially Ringed Seals, Bearded Seals, and Harp Seals. During winter, Polar Bears are mainly observed over sea ice. Maternal denning sites are usually situated in snowdrifts on land near the coast, though they can also be found in frozen ground. They may be forced onto land for several months when sea ice is not present.



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Among icebergs



© PETER THOMAS

Davis Strait sea ice



© PETER THOMAS

Tundra coast

Bears from the Davis Strait population will occasionally cross the Strait of Belle Isle over winter ice and reach northern Newfoundland, making them among the southernmost Polar Bears in the world.



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A sow hunts for seals

Interesting Points

- They may travel as far as 200 km offshore on ice and in marine waters.
- Polar bear skin is black, which helps them soak up the sun's energy.
- Their fur can reflect the colours of the sky and snow and can provide added camouflage while hunting.
- Their scientific name derives from the fact they spend most of their time at sea.
- A male Polar Bear can weigh as much as 800 kg (1760 lbs) and the largest on record weighed 1002 kg (2210 lbs) and was found in Alaska.
- Their paws are entirely furred and help to insulate their feet and increase traction on ice and snow.
- The paws are enlarged which is useful for paddling in water, breaking through the ice above seal lairs, and digging through snow and ice.
- The Polar Bear (or “Nanuk”) is an important part of Inuit culture and mythology in Labrador.



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Eating its catch



© SUSANNE MILLER, US FWS

Sow and two cubs



© SUSANNE MILLER, US FWS

Resting on land before ice floes develop in the winter

Threats to Survival

- Starvation due to a lack of access to ice-dependent seals.
- Human-caused mortalities when bears frequent communities.
- Hunting mortalities potentially threaten this species across its range; however, hunting quotas in NL are considered low and sustainable.
- Cannibalistic predation.
- Potential threats include contamination from offshore development and sea traffic, and the accumulation of environmental contaminants in Polar Bear tissues.

How You Can Help

Do your part to reduce your greenhouse gas emissions at home and work to help maintain ice floes in the Arctic. Avoid encounters with Polar Bears; this may reduce the number of human-caused mortalities.

Contacts, Information & Sighting Reports

Contact: NL DEC Wildlife Division (709) 637-2026

Info: www.env.gov.nl.ca/env/wildlife/endangeredspecies/

Similar Species

There are no species similar to Polar Bear in Atlantic Canada.