

POLAR BEARS

Polar bears are the largest of all the bears, with adult males weighing as much as 700kg. They can be found in the Arctic Circle in areas such as Greenland, Canada, Alaska, Norway and Russia. They are classified as marine mammals because they spend many months of the year at sea hunting seals, their main source of food.

Polar bears are still-hunters - they lie in wait for their prey for many hours, ambushing the unsuspecting creature as it comes near. However, they are excellent swimmers, being able to swim for three or four days continuously at up to 6 mph. They are sometimes forced to hunt on land when they cannot hunt seals. They are able to smell their prey a mile away and can sprint at up to 25 mph.

Unlike other members of the bear family, polar bears do not have specific territories for the simple reason that they need to move with the prey as the season changes. The adults are solitary creatures, although they do get together in the breeding season which is usually in April or May. The female digs a maternity den in the snow to give birth. She produces two cubs which are born blind, naked and completely helpless, needing round the clock protection whilst feeding on the mother's milk. Eventually mother and cubs leave the protection of the den to walk the long distance to the sea ice where the mother can begin hunting once again.

Despite their size, polar bears are a severely threatened species. Experts believe that this is largely due to the effects of climate change which has led to loss of habitat. Polar bears hunt their prey from a platform of sea ice, but warmer global temperatures have caused much of the sea ice to melt. This drives the bears to shore where hunting is less productive, with the inevitable consequence that many bears die from starvation.

Some questions to answer:

- How many cubs does a female usually give birth to?
- Can you name three countries in the Arctic Circle?
- Why are polar bears termed 'still-hunters'?
- Why are polar bears classified as 'marine' mammals?
- What is the main threat to polar bears?



True or false?

- A polar bear can swim three days without stopping.
- They prey mainly on penguins.
- Polar bears are mammals.
- They can smell their prey up to six miles away.
- Polar bears can be found in Iceland.
- The main threat to polar bears is hunting by humans.

Technical vocabulary

- Any factual text will contain words that you might not use in everyday language but are specific to the subject being written about. This is known as **technical vocabulary**.
- An example in the above piece is the word 'species'.
- Highlight all the technical vocabulary in the text on polar bears.