Polar bears are the largest land carnivore in North America. An adult male typically weighs 300-450 kg, stretching 3 metres from nose to tail. They are strong, fast, agile on land and ice, and are expert swimmers and divers. Their sense of smell is exceptional, with the sense of taste and hearing also very acute. Their heart, lungs and liver are large to cope with the high oxygen demands of their lifestyle. They can live to 25 years or more in the wild.

Polar bears are predators, primarily hunting seals, while grizzlies and black bears are omnivores. When bears and people occupy the same area, conflict can arise. Polar bears and people have coexisted for thousands of years but contact between the two must be minimised to continue this legacy. Successful polar bear conservation requires your co-operation.

For your safety and the safety of the bears, learn about safe travel in polar bear country and take precautions. By choosing to travel in polar bear country you not only accept the associated risks, but also the responsibility to alter your plans, actions and attitudes to accommodate these magnificent animals.

Report all polar bear sightings and signs to park staff, as soon as possible.

For more information:

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
Box 355
Parry Sound, ON X0A 0G0
PHONE: 867-473-2500
E-MAIL: nunavut.info@pc.gc.ca

Sirmilik National Park
Box 350
Fond inlet, NU X0A 0G0
PHONE: 867-899-8002
E-MAIL: sirmilk.info@pc.gc.ca

Inukssuit National Park
Box 220
Repulse Bay, NU X1A 0R0
PHONE: 867-652-4500
E-MAIL: inukssuit.info@pc.gc.ca

Margo Supplies
A supplier of bear deterrents and warning devices.
www.margosupplies.com

ISBN: 0-77-1-1-104-19  200-0-0320-0017-8

Innuksuit National Park
Box 127
Churchill, MB R0B 0C0
PHONE: 204-777-8688
E-MAIL: sirmilk.info@pc.gc.ca

Wapusk National Park
Box 60
Pangnirtung, NU X0A 0R0
PHONE: 867-777-8800
E-MAIL: picc5@pc.gc.ca

Auyuittuq National Park
Box 471
Repulse Bay, NU X0C 0H0
PHONE: 867-462-4500
E-MAIL: ukkusiksalik.info@pc.gc.ca

Sirmilik National Park
Box 300
Repulse Bay, NU X1A 0R0
PHONE: 867-652-4500
E-MAIL: inukssuit.info@pc.gc.ca

Safety in
Polar Bear
Country
Bringing you Canada’s natural and historic treasures.

SAFETY IN POLAR BEAR COUNTRY

Never approach a fresh kill or carcass as polar bears will defend their food.

Be especially careful in areas along the coast, where a polar bear may be restricted visibility.

Be alert and aware of your surroundings. Scan all around with binoculars at regular intervals.

Be vigilant! Watch for signs such as tracks, snout markings, etc.

Follow this emergency checklist:

1. Attempt to retreat to a safe distance.
2. Make noise by talking, blowing a whistle, shouting, etc.
3. Do not run (this may increase your speed of pursuit).
4. Do not feed or attempt to feed the bear.
5. Report your encounter.
6. Continue watching for the bear.
7. Make sure the bear is not approaching.
8. Leave area immediately.
9. Report numbers at your orientation to the park.

10. Keep numbers and last locations of all polar bears involved in the incident.

STAY CALM

Report extent of injuries and property damage.

Call for help by radio or satellite phone. (Get contact numbers at your orientation to the park.)

Report location and time of incident.

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STAY CALM

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Call for help by radio or satellite phone. (Get contact numbers at your orientation to the park.)

Report location and time of incident.
Avoid bear feeding areas. A polar bear’s primary food source is seal so these species are often found in the same places.

- In fall, winter and early spring: Most polar bears are on the sea ice hunting seals by the floe edge, open water leads and along pressure ridges. Bears and seals can also be found in places where the ice is thin or cracked, such as tide cracks in land-fast ice or at toes of glaciers. Seals can more easily maintain breathing holes in these areas.
- In early spring, females with cubs tend to hunt along pressure ridges and cracks in land-fast ice (particularly in bays) where seal birthing dens are found.
- During the ice-free summer season, when polar bears are forced ashore, they can be found anywhere but they generally hunt and scavenge along coastlines, beaches and rocky islands. Keep an eye on the ocean, polar bears are often well hidden when swimming.

Stay away from polar bear den sites. Unlike other bears, there is no time when all polar bears are learning it.

- Maternity dens are excavated by pregnant females in snow drifts on leeward (wind protected) slopes of coastal hills and valleys. In the Baffin Region, dens can be found at high elevations on snowfields and glaciers. Maternity dens are occupied from fall to early spring. The dens are inconspicuous, however, bear tracks leading to and from them in the early autumn or late spring or ventilation holes can indicate their presence.
- Temporary dens are excavated in snow drifts or pressure ridges by polar bears (males, females and females with cubs) that are active over the winter. The dens can be used as resting places or as temporary shelter from bad weather. They can be used from a few days to several months.
- Summer retreat dens are excavated during the open water season in the remaining snow banks or into the permafrost. These can also be at higher elevations on snowfields and glaciers or the valleys leading up to them. Male and female bears of all age groups use them to keep cool and avoid insect harassment.

Avoid camping on beaches, islands, along coastlines and on obvious movement corridors.

- Before making camp, look around for tracks or other signs of bear activity.
- Polar bears often travel along coastlines using points of land and rocky islets near the coast to navigate.
- In the summer, blowing sea ice may transport polar bears into coastal areas. Avoid areas where the pack ice is blowing in to shore.
- Valleys and passes are often used to cross peninsulas or islands and to move from one area to another.
- Polar bears travel and hunt along the edges of ice floes.

Camp inland on a butte or bluff with a good view of surrounding terrain. Avoid areas where bears might hide, such as blind corners, snow banks, pressure ridges and other places with visual impediments.

Set up tents in a line rather than a circle and maintain at least 5 metres between them. If a bear comes into camp, it will not feel surrounded. If you allow bears to become habituated to your presence, they may become aggressive. Do not make your presence known by cooking at your campsite. Set up a portable trip-wire or motion detector alarm system around your tent. Alert a friend if a polar bear approaches your camp. Before leaving home, contact Parks Canada for more information.

If you wish to take a dog, but only one that has proven experience with polar bears. Several dogs are better than one. Know how to handle them. Keep them staked so they cannot run off to keep watch if a polar bear comes into camp. It will not feel surrounded. If you operate a guiding or outfitter business and wish your guides to be considered for a guide or bear monitor permit, please contact the National Park or Site or Field Unit Office.

The exception to this regulation is for beneficiaries of the Inuit Final Agreement, the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement, the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, the Nunavik Inuit Land Claim Agreement and any future land claim agreements, who can carry firearms when engaged in traditional activities within national parks within their land claim areas.

WARNING systems

Set up a portable trip-wire or motion detector alarm system around your tent. Alert a friend if a polar bear approaches your camp. Before leaving home, contact Parks Canada for more information.

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Deterrents

Reducing the threat posed by a polar bear during an interaction may be difficult. Non-lethal deterrents cannot be depended on to ensure safety. The best way to live safely with bears is to avoid contact with them.

Any potential weapon must be considered, such as skis, poles, rocks, blocks of ice or even knives. Stay together as a group. This can be a deterrent and actions, such as making noise, jumping, waving arms, throwing things, may help to drive a polar bear away.

Commercial deterrents

- Noisemakers including air horns, pistol and pen launched bear bangers may scare a bear away.
- Pepper spray is effective against polar bears, but has some limitations. It must be warm enough to atomize and it must be used at close range. Also be aware of wind direction to avoid having the spray blow into your face.
- Know how and when to use these deterrents and practice beforehand.
- Availability of commercial deterrents is limited in the north, most will have to be purchased elsewhere and transported as dangerous goods.
- Portable solar electric fences may deter a bear at your campsite if properly installed and maintained.
- Contact Parks Canada for more information.

Report all bear sightings and signs to park staff.

In Canada’s national parks it is unlawful to possess a firearm unless you are a licensed guide or bear monitor with a permit. Consider hiring a guide or a bear monitor for increased safety. If you operate a guiding or outfitter business and wish your guides to be considered for a guide or bear monitor permit, please contact the National Park or Site or Field Unit Office.

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Never get between a bear and her cubs.

If a female with cubs is surprised at close range or separated from her cubs she will likely attack to defend her cubs.

- Leave the area immediately.
- Stay in a group.
- Fight back if she attacks.

Always leave an escape route for the bear.

Carry deterrents and know how to use them.

CONTACT PARKS CANADA FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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