



You are in POLAR BEAR COUNTRY



POLAR BEAR CONSERVATION

For your safety and the safety of the polar 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 risk, but also the responsibility to alter your plans, actions and attitudes to accommodate these magnificent animals.

PROTECTION

In Manitoba, polar bears have been protected under The Wildlife Act since 1991. In 2008, polar bears and their habitat on both Crown and privately-owned land received additional protection when they were listed as threatened under The Endangered Species Act. Wapusk National Park and the Churchill Wildlife Management Area are important regions for the protection of polar bears. This area protects one of the largest concentrations of polar bear maternity dens in the world, and also represents lands used by polar bears as a staging area while they await freeze-up of Hudson Bay. Typically, bears are on land from mid July to mid-November.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Changes in climate have made sea ice more unpredictable. Over the last 30 years, the average date of the sea ice break-up on Hudson Bay has advanced by about 3 weeks. This shortens the polar bears' important spring hunting season when they make up the bulk of their fat storage from the bounty of recently born ringed seal pups.

Earlier ice break-up results in the polar bears coming ashore with less fat reserves and spending longer periods on land without access to their main food source. This can result in serious consequences for the future survival of the Western Hudson Bay population of polar bears. Their future is uncertain!



HUNTING

- Polar bears depend on sea ice as a hunting platform.
- Their primary prey is the ringed seal, but like other bears they are opportunists, always searching for possible food sources. This may include small mammals, berries, eggs, birds and even humans. They will also scavenge from carcasses or human garbage

SEASONAL MOVEMENT

Winter & Spring (mid-November to mid-July)

- The majority of polar bears are out on the sea ice.
- Females who have given birth over the winter are the exception, as they have settled inland in a maternity den since the fall and will remain there until early March when they emerge with their new litter and make their way to the sea ice to resume hunting. They will not have had a sustainable food source for 7-8 months.

Summer & Fall (mid-July to mid-November)

- As the sea ice melts on Hudson Bay, polar bears are forced ashore
- Bears spend this time in a fasting state, conserving energy and trying to keep cool while they await the return of the sea ice in mid-November

When the ice is strong enough, polar bears will leave land and move onto the sea ice, where they can resume hunting.

POLAR BEAR FACTS

BIOLOGY

- Polar bears are the largest land carnivore in North America
- In the Western Hudson Bay population, an adult male typically weighs more than 400 kg (850 lbs)
- Females are approximately half the size of male bears
- Polar bears have an acute sense of smell
- Their eyesight is comparable to humans
- Unlike other bears, polar bears do not hibernate in the winter

BEHAVIOUR

- Polar bears are naturally curious, but seem to prefer avoiding confrontations with humans or other polar bears
- They are strong, fast, and agile. Polar bears may appear slow and docile, but they are capable of moving swiftly and with purpose in the blink of an eye.
- Polar bears resting near a food source (e.g. carcass) or female bears with cubs are likely to show defensive behaviours

REPRODUCTION

- Mating season occurs in spring
- Polar bears have delayed implantation. Development of the egg stops shortly after fertilization and doesn't implant in the wall of the uterus until after the female bear has put on weight from hunting and eating seal pups in the spring. This delay in implantation is nature's way of making sure that the mother has enough body fat to sustain herself and produce milk for hungry young. Only if she gains enough weight will the 1 to 3 fertilized eggs she is carrying implant and continue to develop. Once mature (4-6 years old), females in the Western Hudson Bay population average 2 cubs every 3 years. They may have only 1 or as many as 3 cubs within that 3 year period.

VIEWING POLAR BEARS

Whether viewing polar bears with a tour operator or from the safety of a vehicle, you must be aware of the danger. Polar bears are strong, fast and agile. They should be respected at all times.

Give bears their space. Keep a distance of at least 100 metres (330 feet) between you and the bear(s). Refrain from whistling or calling to the bears – they are wild animals, not pets.

View polar bears without disturbing their natural behaviour. If their behaviour changes, YOU ARE TOO CLOSE, or you are disturbing them in some way.

Polar bears should never be approached on foot!

WITH A TOUR COMPANY

Many local tour operators offer excursions permitting you to view polar bears from the safety of a vehicle. For your safety and the safety of others follow your guides directions.

WITH YOUR OWN VEHICLE OR A RENTED VEHICLE

When viewing polar bears, stay in your vehicle at all times. REMEMBER, bears can move very quickly! Stay at least 100 metres (330 feet) from all polar bears.

If the bear is obviously disturbed by your presence, leave the vicinity immediately!



The following describes a variety of circumstances when encountering a bear and how you should react:

If a bear does not know you are there:

- Do not run or move quickly. You may attract the bear's attention
- Quietly back away and leave the area
- Stay downwind, if possible
- Keep the bear in sight at all times.

If a bear knows you are there, and shows signs of being curious

– which could include the bear moving slowly with frequent stops, standing on hind legs and sniffing the air, holding its head high with ears forward, moving its head from side to side, or trying to catch your scent by circling downwind:

- put your arms up over your head and slowly wave you hands in the air
- talk loudly in a low tone
- move away slowly, do not run, upwind of the bear if possible so that it can get your scent

These actions will help the bear identify you as a human.

If you surprise a bear at close range:

In this situation a bear may run away or become aggressive. Aggressive behaviour can usually be identified through huffing, panting, hissing or snapping of the jaw; feet stomping, direct eye contact and/or lowered head and ears pulled back.

- avoid quick movement which may be perceived as threatening
- do not shout, talk loud in a low tone
- avoid eye contact
- back away slowly, do not run
- be prepared to defend yourself

If a bear charges:

- Do not run
- Stand your ground and be prepared to fight!
- Use any potential weapons
- Group together
- Make loud noises

Report all polar bear sightings to Parks Canada or call Manitoba Conservation staff at 675 BEAR (675-2327)

WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS

Polar bears are found throughout Canada's North. In some areas, like Churchill, they occupy the same territory as humans for a significant part of the year.

When people and bears mix, conflict can arise.

MANAGING FOR SAFETY

Parks Canada and Manitoba Conservation staff monitor Parks Canada sites in northern Manitoba, the Town of Churchill and the surrounding area for the presence of polar bears. When a bear is detected in an area of human use, they are often chased away or removed from these sites. Ensuring that there are no attractants for bears in these areas is essential to minimizing the risk of an encounter.

Parks Canada's Polar Bear Safety Plan and Manitoba Conservation's Polar Bear Alert Program are in place to minimize the chance of human and bear encounters, but you may still encounter a bear at any time. Bear monitors or patrols may miss a bear, or a bear may enter an area after the area has been cleared.

Please follow all instructions from your guide, Parks Canada Polar Bear Monitor or Manitoba Conservation Patrol Officer. Obey all signs and polar bear warnings posted in the area.

Your co-operation in helping prevent dangerous encounters is essential; it may save a life, either of a human or a polar bear.

PARKS CANADA SITES

Parks Canada is responsible for four sites in northern Manitoba: York Factory National Historic Site, Wapusk National Park, Parks Canada Visitor Centre in the Churchill Heritage Railway Station and Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site, including Cape Merry Battery and Sloop Cove.

Except for the Visitor Centre, these sites pose a high risk of Polar bear encounters and should never be visited without a registered guide or Parks Canada staff member.

To inquire about visiting these sites, please call 1-204-675-8863



CHURCHILL AND SURROUNDING AREA

When visiting Churchill, you should be aware that a polar bear may be encountered anywhere at any time of year. If you wish to explore the shoreline or to venture away from the town centre, we recommend that you do so with a local tourism agency.

If traveling out of town on your own, stay close to your vehicle and remember that a bear may be encountered at any time.

When should you call the Polar Bear Alert line?

- If you see a bear in town or on the town border.
- If you observe a bear near any outlying residential area (i.e. Goose Creek, Camp Nanuk, Churchill Northern Studies Centre)

To report the presence of a bear in an area of human use, call the Polar Bear Alert Line at 675-BEAR (675-2327)

SAFETY IN POLAR BEAR COUNTRY

TRAVEL SAFETY

Inform yourself

- Ask Parks Canada or Manitoba Conservation staff about bear activity in the area. Some areas may be closed due to high bear activity – watch for warning signs.
- Obey all written and oral warnings

Stay Alert

- Be alert and aware of your surroundings
- Be vigilant! Watch for signs such as tracks, droppings, diggings and carcasses along the shoreline that may be scavenged by bears

Where and When to travel

- Avoid areas along the coast where polar bears may be hidden from view behind boulders, sea ice, driftwood or vegetation
- Travel in daylight and avoid areas with restricted visibility
- Avoid areas where there are strong smells, which may attract a polar bear (e.g. garbage facilities, carcasses, etc.)
- NEVER go beyond a "Polar Bear" warning sign. These are posted in areas of greater risk.

How to travel

- Traveling in groups increases your safety. The larger the group, the greater the chance of deterring a bear
- Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return
- NEVER leave your vehicle if you encounter a bear, and always stay close to your vehicle when exploring
- Walking out of town or along the shoreline will place you at greater risk of encountering a bear – this is strongly discouraged!
- Don't carry foodstuff on you.

HIRING A GUIDE

Local people have knowledge about polar bears and how to deal with them. Ask about their experience; how they avoid encountering a polar bear and about plans of action should you encounter a bear.

IT IS UNLAWFUL TO:

- Touch or disturb a polar bear (chasing or approaching is considered a disturbance)
- Feed or put out food for a polar bear
- Bait or attract a polar bear

Feeding any wildlife makes them associate people with food. This causes the animal to lose their natural fear of humans and to look to people as a new food source.

Polar bears fed by humans are more likely to injure and attack.

Once this behaviour is learned, the bear becomes very dangerous and may have to be destroyed.



WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER A POLAR BEAR

Even in a patrolled environment, you may encounter a polar bear. Like humans, polar bears have distinct personalities and it is impossible to predict how a bear will react to an encounter with a human.

Polar bears are wildlife, regardless of how docile they may appear. A polar bear may be curious and approach you, or, it may be aggressive and not tolerate your presence. A female bear is protective of her cubs; she may move them to safety or threaten you.

Before you explore an area, think of how you would deal with a polar bear encounter. Discuss possible plans of action in different circumstances.

Knowing how to react can save your life and the life of others.

Give them their space

Every bear defends a "critical space," depending upon the bear and the situation; this space may be from a few metres to one hundred metres. Intrusion within this space is considered a threat and may provoke an attack. Remember, always leave an escape route for the bear.

How to react if you encounter a bear

- STAY CALM and assess the situation
- DO NOT RUN or move quickly, which may attract the bears attention
- Do not play dead
- Keep an eye on the bear
- Go to a secure place (building, vehicle)
- Follow the directions of your tour guide

ALL POLAR BEARS ARE DANGEROUS.

NEVER APPROACH A POLAR BEAR.

**WATCH FOR AND OBEY THE
"POLAR BEAR" WARNING SIGNS.**