

News & Comments

Despite Sea Ice Shortages, Polar Bears Survive in Greenland

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Polar bears are one magnificent group of animals that represent the Arctic region. These giant creatures are super swimmers and love the sea more than land, because they hunt for seals from the sea ice, to fulfil their caloric needs and survive the harsh climate.

Scientists have discovered that a subpopulation of polar bears is living in Southeast Greenland that hunts mostly freshwater ice originating from the continent's glaciers as it flows into the ocean. It may provide insight into the future of polar bears in a changing Arctic environment since the isolated population is genetically unique. Fjords - long, narrow coastal inlets where glaciers meet the ocean - are home to bears that live on steep slopes around fjords and hunt in a patchwork of glacial ice that breaks up in these inlets.

The team who surveyed the region accidentally stumbled upon this rare subpopulation of polar bears. They knew that bears were in this area, but didn't know how special they were, according to polar scientist Kristin Laidre. This area wasn't given much attention previously because of the harsh, extreme climatic conditions and rough terrains, but new data shows the ability of bears to withstand it all just by using ice from the glacier.

Since changing climate poses a threat to polar bears, the authors of the study believe that they can gain some insight into the future of the species after studying this new population. It is important, however, to avoid extrapolating the findings too far, since the glaciers that support Southeast Greenland bears aren't available in much of the Arctic.

According to Professor Beth Shapiro, a co-author of the study, this subpopulation of polar bears has lived apart from other populations for more than a century. Among the other 19 documented populations of polar bears, this subpopulation differs genetically from its closest genetic neighbour the most.

KEYWORDS

Glaciers, NASA, Polar Bear, Ice sheet, Ice shelf, Greenland ice sheet, Larsen Ice Shelf, Ice age, Glacier, Iceberg, bears, glaciers, climate change, sea ice, arctic ecosystems, animal habitats, population genetics, population biology

