

Not Too Cold for a Polar Bear

by Kitty Colton



Q

RW 249

E 15

Polar bears adapt to their environment. Read to find out how these interesting animals survive the cold.

Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2

Not Too Cold for a Polar Bear

by Kitty Colton

Do you ever wonder how animals stay warm in cold environments? They can't wrap themselves in blankets or turn up the heat. They can't bundle up in sweaters and scarves. They can't make soup or hot chocolate! But animals have their own ways of keeping warm.

Adapting to the Environment

When it comes to surviving extreme cold, no animal is better adapted than the



Polar bears live in the Arctic region near the North Pole.

polar bear. The polar bear is the largest of the eight species, or kinds, of bears. Polar bears live only in very cold climates like the Arctic region.

The word Arctic tells you that the polar bear's environment is icy cold. In the winter, temperatures can drop to minus 50 degrees. As if that's not enough reason to shiver, polar bears also spend a great deal of time in the icy Arctic Ocean. Polar bears are the largest predators on land. They mainly hunt and eat seals, and because seals are usually found in the ocean, polar bears are often found in or near the ocean, too. They are excellent swimmers.

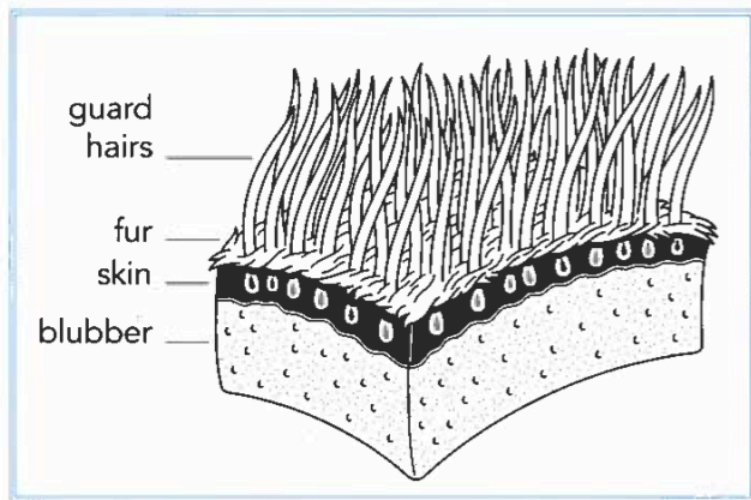


Polar bears are classified as marine mammals.

Surviving the Cold

How do polar bears survive all that cold? Polar bears are very well adapted to life in the frozen Arctic. A polar bear's entire body, even the bottoms of its feet, is covered in fur. The fur protects it from the cold. The top layer of fur is called guard hair. Guard hair sticks together when it's wet. The wet hair is a barrier that protects polar bears from the cold water. ■

Below the guard hairs is a downy undercoat of fur that gives polar bears another layer of warmth. Underneath their fur, polar bears have black skin. The black



Amazing fact: Beneath its fur, a polar bear has black skin. The dark color absorbs the heat of the sun.

color helps them absorb heat through their skin. And beneath their skin they have a layer of blubber. The blubber both protects them from the cold and helps them float in the water. Polar bears' blubber is usually 2 to 4 inches thick.

Some species of bears make dens. They sleep in their dens during the coldest winter months. Those bears wake up only once in a while. Polar bears stay awake all winter long, but their body functions slow down to save energy.

Sometimes, polar bears even get too warm! When this happens, they lie flat on the ice or on their backs with their feet in the air to cool off their body temperatures.



Glossary

adapted	well-matched for the place in which one lives
Arctic	the region around the North Pole
environment	the conditions that surround an animal and affect its life
predators	animals that hunt and eat other animals
species	a group of animals that are alike in many ways