

Polar Bear

Can you imagine hibernating for months at a time, without eating or using the bathroom? That's what polar bears do. They live in the most northern regions of the planet, called the Arctic. Their thick, white fur and a large layer of fat help them adapt to very cold temperatures.

Polar bears use the large pieces of ice floating in the sea as platforms for hunting their favorite meal: seals. They are excellent swimmers and can swim up to 6 miles per hour. That's faster than many people can run over a long distance! The bears use their front paws to "doggy paddle," and they float easily because of their body fat.

When ocean explorers work in the Arctic, they often see polar bears on the ice. The scientists keep watch to make sure that the polar bears do not get too close to them because a polar bear could attack a human if it were very hungry or it felt threatened by the presence of humans.

You may have seen or heard about polar bears when climate change is being discussed. As our climate is becoming warmer, the polar ice melts more every year, which makes the polar bear's habitat smaller. If too much ice melts, the polar bears may go extinct. Why can't we just study these bears in zoos? They don't go into hibernation when they are in zoos. Studying their hibernation is important because it could help us to understand how their bodies survive with no food or water when they sleep for months at a time. We may learn something about our own bodies by studying polar bears.

