

Respect bears. Your proper conduct will ensure that polar bear viewing opportunities can continue in the future. Thank you for your efforts!

- Do not allow bears to make contact with you or your vehicle or boat.
- Allow swimming bears to pass.
- Do not get between a mother and her cubs.
- Do not feed or otherwise attempt to attract bears.
- Do not herd, follow, or chase bears.
- Stop your approach if a bear notices you. Allow it to resume what it was doing before you proceed.
- Approach slowly with minimal noise, lights, or movement.
- Respect bears' personal space—avoid close encounters.
- View bears only during daylight hours. Be in a group and in a vehicle or boat.
- Review bear safety information before coming to bear country (at <http://arctic.fws.gov/visitors.htm>).

It is legal to view and photograph polar bears. It is unsafe and illegal to disturb polar bears.

Kaktovik Guidelines for Viewing Polar Bears



Kaktovik Guidelines for Community Visitors

- Please be conscientious when visiting our community. We welcome safe and respectful viewing of polar bears and whaling activities.
- Take photos from a distance. Obey barriers set to ensure safe viewing.
- To continue the community's traditional food-gathering activities, federal law permits community members to hunt bowhead whales. Please respect these traditional activities by staying out of the way during butchering.
- When you view polar bears, use a trained guide. This will ensure safe conduct that obeys federal polar bear protection laws.
- It's OK to purchase handcrafted items made from marine mammals. The Marine Mammal Protection Act allows only Native Alaskans to sell handcrafted items made of marine mammal parts. Except for these handcrafted items, it is illegal for non-Natives to possess, transport, or sell marine mammal products. Check to ensure that *import* of marine mammal parts into your country is legal.

Respect our community. Your proper conduct will ensure that polar bear and whale viewing opportunities can continue in the future. Thank you for your efforts!

About Polar Bears

Polar bears have an important place in the cultural traditions of Alaska Natives, who recognize the bears' amazing strength, hunting ability and stealth.

Residents and visitors have a unique opportunity to see polar bears in Kaktovik. These bears are part of the Southern Beaufort Sea population, estimated at 1,500 animals. This population uses an area extending more than 800 miles along the north coast of Alaska and Canada. Polar bears prefer to be on ice but as it diminishes each summer and fall the bears come to the coast surrounding Kaktovik to rest, feed, wait for the ice to re-form, and sometimes to den and give birth.

At Barter Island, polar bears on land may encounter brown bears. Polar bears are much larger than brown bears. Adult male polar bears typically measure 8 to 9 feet from nose to tail and can weigh up to 1,320 pounds. Adult female polar bears are typically about half the size of males. Despite their larger size, polar bears are often displaced by brown bears when feeding at the bone pile.

Polar bears are specially adapted to the Arctic environment. Bears have white coloration for camouflage; water repellent guard hairs and dense underfur; black skin for absorbing warmth; small "suction cups" on the soles of their feet for traction on slippery ice; teeth specialized for a meat-eating rather than a meat-and-plant diet; and the ability to store large amounts of fat when food is available and then use it later when food is scarce. Polar bears primarily eat ringed seals but they also hunt bearded seals, walrus, and beluga whales, and will scavenge beached carcasses they find along the coast.

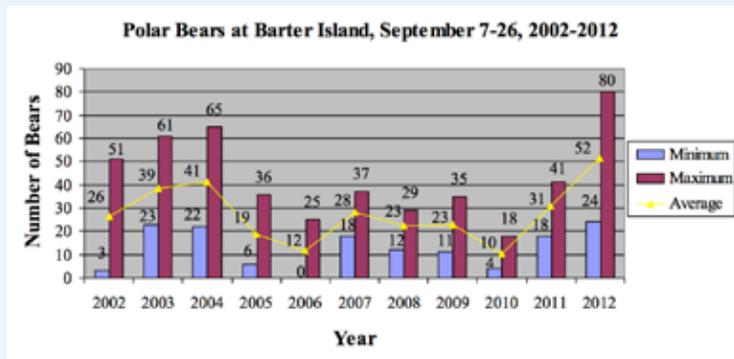
Polar bears generally live alone except when concentrating along the coast during the open water period, or when mating or rearing cubs. Pregnant females spend late October or November until late March or April in winter dens. Other polar bears do not usually den, and are active year-round. Polar bear dens are often located on land in areas where snow accumulates, such as along the coastal bluffs and river banks surrounding Kaktovik. Dens may also be excavated in pressure ridges on sea ice.

Pregnant bears give birth to 1 to 3 tiny, helpless and almost hairless cubs in mid-winter. Mother and cubs are protected within a snow den that provides relative warmth and stable temperatures, where the mother nurses and cares for her young until March or early April. Once the family emerges they move onto sea ice, where the cubs learn to hunt. Cubs stay with their mother for approximately 2½ years.

Denning is an important time for the developing polar bear cubs. Winter den disturbance can cause den abandonment and cub death. Viewing polar bears within winter denning habitat is not recommended.

A warming climate is causing the disappearance of arctic sea ice, leaving wide stretches of open water the bears must swim across when traveling between ice and land. It is common for bears to rest on land without moving for days after completing such long-distance swims. Stay away from such bears and let them rest undisturbed.

Polar Bear Numbers on Barter Island



- Polar bear counts from 2002 to 2012 are variable. They don't show a clear trend at this time.
- Polar bears of all ages and both sexes use Barter Island. This area may be especially important for nutritionally stressed bears.
- Polar bears typically arrive at Barter Island in August and remain until October when the ocean freezes. Count dates were established in 2002 to estimate the number of bears using subsistence-harvested whale remains.
- Continued monitoring is needed and is on-going.

Why Polar Bears Visit Barter Island

- During fall, the highest density of polar bears along the north coast of Alaska and western Canada occur around Barter Island.
- The number of polar bears on shore seems to be closely correlated to the distance of ice from shore. Reductions in sea ice could result in increasing land use by polar bears.
- One reason polar bears are attracted to Barter Island is because of the subsistence whale carcasses here.
- Another reason polar bears are attracted here may be because the density of ringed seals, one of their preferred foods, is higher here than elsewhere along the coast. The ice freezes here first in the fall, providing a good platform from which they can hunt for the seals.