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Marine Mammal Milestones

By DARLING CETACEANS, Vol 1 Issue 1

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## **POLAR BEAR**

Not all marine mammals spend their entire life in the ocean, like whales. Because the Polar bear swims in the ocean, feeds from the ocean and relies on the ocean to survive; it too is considered a marine mammal by most scientists. The scientific name, *Ursus maritimus*, even means “sea bear.”

Newborn bears are called cubs. They are usually born in pairs and weigh only 2 pounds. A female will give birth to a new set of cubs every 3 years.

As adults, male polar bears are independent by nature. They join females during breeding season (April through June). Males may grow to 11 feet and weigh as much as 1400 pounds. Females are about 8 feet and weigh 600 pounds.

A female’s weight varies greatly depending on the season and pregnancy. She can increase her body fat by 50 percent while overindulging on seals, then fast for 8 months.

Due to a change in habitat from global warming and human intrusion, the overall average of the polar bear’s size has decreased.

Polar bears are excellent swimmers. According John Eliot of National Geographic, they are able to swim 100 miles straight. Typically, they do not go that far.

Holding the title of “largest of the land carnivores,” polar bears enjoy a seal by waiting long periods next to a breathing hole in the ice. Eventually, a seal will come up to breathe and is snatched by the bear. Their diet may also include eggs, birds and some marine vegetation.

Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, the Soviet Union and the United States of America signed the International Agreement on Polar Bear Conservation in 1973. Each country maintains different laws regarding hunting. Today, Russia has a problem with poaching of bears.