

SUMMER

During the open water season retreat dens are excavated in snow banks or permafrost. Dens may also be at higher elevations on snowfields, glaciers or in valleys leading up to them, keeping bears cool and away from insects.

POLAR BEAR ENCOUNTERS

You may encounter a polar bear by chance or because it is attracted to your activity. Polar bears are curious and may investigate any strange objects, smell or noise. Always stay calm and assess the situation. Each encounter with a polar bear is unique. Good judgment, common sense and familiarity with polar bear behaviour are important.

CURIOS BEARS

If a bear knows you are there and shows signs of being curious such as moving slowly with frequent stops, standing on hind legs and sniffing the air, holding its head high with ears forward or to the side, moving its head from side to side, or trying to catch your scent by circling downwind and approaching from behind, back away slowly. Help the bear identify you as human by talking in low tones. Move slowly upwind of the bear so that it can get your scent. Always leave an escape route for the bear. Do not run.

DEFENSIVE BEARS

If a bear has been surprised at close range or shows signs of being agitated or threatened such as huffing, panting, hissing, growling,

When you travel in Nunavut you are in polar bear country. Polar bears are among the largest carnivores in the world. They are strong, fast and agile on ice, land, as well as in the water. The best way to be safe is to avoid them.

jaw-snapping, stomping its feet, staring directly at a person, or lowering its head with ears laid back, back away slowly. Do not shout or make sudden movements. Avoid direct eye contact. Act non-threatening. Be prepared to use deterrents. Do not run.

PREDATORY BEARS

If a bear shows signs of stalking or hunting you such as: following or circling you, approaching directly, intently and unafraid, returning after being scared away, or appears wounded, old or thin, group together and make loud noises. Be prepared to use deterrents. Be prepared to fight back. Do not run.

BEARS WITH CUBS

Never get between a bear and her cubs. If you come across a bear with cubs, do not run. Group together and leave the area immediately. Be prepared to fight back if the bear attacks.

If you experience a polar bear attack use any available weapons such as rocks, blocks of ice, knives, skis or poles.

AVOID ENCOUNTERS

Stay alert. Always travel in groups of at least four people and stay together to increase your safety. Make noise as you travel through bear country to communicate your presence. Always travel in daylight and be aware of your surroundings. Polar bears may be hard to see. Scan around with binoculars at regular intervals. Avoid areas of restricted visibility, pushed up sea ice, boulders, driftwood or vegetation. Watch



for tracks, droppings and diggings.

Never approach a bear. Polar bears defend their space and may consider you a threat. Never feed bears or other wildlife. A bear that associates humans with food is dangerous. Never approach a wildlife carcass. A bear may be in the area. Leave immediately.

CAMP SAFELY

Avoid camping on beaches and along coastlines. In summer, polar bears often travel along coastlines using points of land and rocky islets near the coast to navigate. Avoid camping in narrow valleys and passes. These may be used by bears to cross peninsulas and to move from one valley to another. Camp inland, on high ground, where you have a good view of your surroundings. Look for bear tracks before you set up camp. Move your camp if there is a bear in the area.

KEEP YOUR CAMP CLEAN

Cook, clean, store food, stoves, pots and all cooking gear including the clothes you cook in, as well as garbage, food scraps, or any scented products at least 100 metres



from your sleeping area. Use bear proof canisters or airtight containers for storage. Feces should be packed out or buried under rocks away from trails, at least 100 metres from your camp and away from all water sources. Put all toilet paper and tampons in a sealed bag with your garbage. Pack out all of your garbage including food scraps and packaging. Do not burn packaging as lingering food odours may become attractants to bears. Pick up any spilled food from your cooking and eating areas. Position your camping, cooking, storage and human waste areas so that you always have a clear escape route from a bear.

Never sleep in the open without a tent. Never bring strong smelling foods or scented products of any kind. Never cook, store food or scented products in your tent.

GET INFORMATION

Consider hiring a local guide if you are uncertain about your ability to deal with polar bears. Educate yourself about the

area where you plan to travel. Contact the Nunavut Parks and Special Places division within the GN's Department of Environment for more information. Find out where and when polar bears have been observed and avoid those areas. Know the types of areas bears use at different times of the year. Get information about bear feeding areas and den sites so that you can avoid them. Pre-plan, rehearse and know what to do for different bear encounter scenarios. Report all encounters, sightings, tracks and other bear signs to Nunavut Parks staff or Wildlife officers as soon as possible.

WARNING SYSTEMS

All members of your group should be familiar with handling bear encounters in a variety of circumstances. Inform yourselves about bear warning systems and deterrents. Know how and when to use them before your trip. Consider bringing and setting up a portable trip-wire or motion detector system to alert you if a polar bear approaches your camp.

DETERRENTS

Availability of commercial bear deterrents such as noisemakers, air horns, as well as pistol and pen launched 'bear bangers' is limited in the Arctic. Most deterrents must be purchased elsewhere and transported as dangerous goods. Pepper spray may work on polar bears but has not been thoroughly tested. Be aware that pepper spray may not work when it is cold or wet.

FIREARMS

Check with Nunavut Parks staff for regulations governing carrying and using firearms.

DOGS

Only travel with dogs if they have proven experience with polar bears. Keep dogs under control at all times. Stake them downwind from your sleeping area. Be sure to clean up dog food leftovers. ■



