

Polar bears

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In news– According to a Canadian government survey, Polar bears in the country's Western Hudson Bay, an inland sea connected to the Arctic Ocean, are dying at a fast rate.

Key findings-

- According to the researchers, **Western Hudson Bay has witnessed a drop of around 50% in the population** of polar bears since the 1980s.
- Western Hudson Bay – the region includes **Churchill, the town that is known as 'the Polar Bear Capital of the World'**.
- It also revealed that females and younger polar bears are the worst affected.
- The Arctic sea ice is crucial to polar bears' survival as they use it not only to hunt seals – their chief food – but also for travelling, mating and resting.
- However, with **rising global temperatures**, the sea ice is breaking earlier in summer and refreezing later in winter, **due to which polar bears get less time to hunt** and have to stay hungry for longer and travel greater distances.
- The report also found that the **change in the diet leads to a higher mortality rate of bear cubs.**

About the polar bear-

- The polar bear is a **hypercarnivorous bear whose native range lies largely within the Arctic Circle**, encompassing the Arctic Ocean, its surrounding seas and surrounding land masses.
- It is the **largest extant bear species, as well as the largest extant land carnivore.**
- They are a powerful symbol of the strength and endurance of the Arctic. The polar bear's Latin name, *Ursus maritimus*, means **"sea bear."** It's an apt name for this

majestic species, which spends much of its life in, around, or on the ocean—predominantly on the sea ice.

- In the United States, Alaska is home to two polar bear subpopulations.
- Considered **talented swimmers, polar bears can sustain a pace of six miles per hour** by paddling with their front paws and holding their hind legs flat like a rudder.
- They have a **thick layer of body fat and a water-repellent coat** that insulates them from the cold air and water.
- Polar bears **spend over 50% of their time hunting for food**. A polar bear might catch only one or two out of 10 seals it hunts, depending on the time of year and other variables.
- Their **diet mainly consists of ringed and bearded seals because they need large amounts of fat to survive**.
- Polar bears **rely heavily on sea ice for traveling, hunting, resting, mating** and, in some areas, maternal dens.
- Polar bears are one of the **most significant predators in the Arctic region and they keep biological populations in balance**.
- The big kills made by them serve as a food resource for scavengers like Arctic foxes and Arctic birds. If polar bears aren't able to hunt animals like seals, it can severely impact the food chain and health of the ecosystem.