The wind blows cold in Arctic regions. Winter temperatures can plunge to -50°F. Brrr! But wildlife lives in this barren, icy part of the world, including the magnificent polar bear.

These are BIG animals. Adult males weigh between 775 to 1200 pounds. Females are usually about one-half this weight. A male standing on its hind legs may be over 10 feet tall. Unlike other bears, polar bears eat mostly meat. And they eat a lot of it. Seals are their favorite meal. A polar bear’s large, curved claws are perfect for pulling a seal from the water.

Polar bears stay busy all winter long. No hibernation for them! Nighttime hours are spent stalking seals gathered on floating sea ice. If the seals are underwater, the bears wait patiently for them to come up for air. When they’re not hunting, polar bears sleep or rest. Sometimes, they use a block of ice as a pillow!

How can polar bears survive in such a cold, icy environment? They are built for it!

- Their paws are super wide and can be 12 inches across. The paws acts as paddles when polar bears are swimming. Huge paws also help distribute the bear’s weight when walking on thin ice. Footpads are covered by small bumps that grip the ice and keep the bears from slipping.
- Polar bears have two layers of fur. The top layer keeps body heat in, and the bottom layer keeps water off their skin.
- Under its fur, a polar bear's skin is black. The black skin absorbs the sun’s heat, helping the bears stay warm. You can see the black skin only on the bear's nose and the pads of its feet.
- A layer of fat (blubber) protects polar bears in freezing water. The fat can be more than four inches thick!
- Their small round ears and compact tails help keep body heat from escaping. Believe it or not, polar bears have a bigger problem with overheating than with being cold (especially when they are running).

So, you see, these Arctic animals can survive in the Far North very well. They are intelligent, powerful, and very clever. The Inuit people, who also live in the Arctic, respect the nanuq (their word for polar bear), and now you know why.
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