



## Guidelines for encounters with – /and observation of polar bears

### Necessity and self-defence

The Ministry wishes to emphasize that according to the penal code provisions on necessity and self-defence any person has the right to protect themselves in a polar bear encounter, e.g. at a sheep farm, a town/settlement, a summer camp, etc.

The Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture must again stress that special authorisation for putting an animal down is not required in cases concerning necessity or self-defence.

It is important to discern between necessity, self-defence and illegal catches. If a polar bear is put down illegally, all parts of the animal will be confiscated by the police and held in custody (in collaboration with the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture) until a ruling is made in the case.

The Ministry occasionally receives a report about a polar bear sighting close to a populated area. When one or more polar bears have been sighted within a town, settlement, sheep farming community, etc., it becomes a police matter as the discharging of firearms in a populated area, which under normal circumstances is forbidden, becomes a possibility. As previously mentioned, the police gets in touch with the Ministry in such cases, and cooperation occurs on a case-by-case basis.

Polar bears pose a potential threat to people, domesticated animals, equipment, property, and so forth. You should not behave in a manner that might provoke an attack.

Feeling adventurous and wanting to get a picture of a polar bear does not justify putting yourself, others or polar bears in danger!

### Feeding polar bears

Feeding polar bears or putting out bait is discouraged, as this will make polar bears associate the scent of humans with food. Doing so may lead to polar bears repeatedly seeking out populated areas.

### Polar bears outside of populated areas

The best way to avoid a polar bear attack is to keep well away from it. Unless you are participating in a sanctioned polar bear hunt, you should leave an area in which a polar bear has been spotted. The Ministry of Fishing, Hunting and Agriculture as well as the local Wildlife and Fisheries Officer are to be notified about polar bear sightings. Contact information is listed on the last page.

What should you do when sighting a polar bear?

- Keep your distance from the polar bear. Leave the area
- Inform the Ministry and provide as many details about the polar bear as possible (phone numbers: 34 53 04 / 55 33 42 / 48 25 20)

When an incident has occurred in a populated area or close to a populated area involving one or more polar bears, the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture has a form that is to be filled out. It is important to read the instructions. The form can be acquired through the local municipal office or downloaded from [www.naalakkersuisut.gl](http://www.naalakkersuisut.gl)

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## Traveling in areas with polar bears

There are polar bears in all parts of Greenland, but there is a greater risk of encountering a polar bear in Upernavik and further north as well as in East Greenland. In the southern parts of Greenland, polar bears are usually seen in the spring and summer time.

When traveling in areas in which polar bear sightings are more frequent, deterrents should be brought along, and you should know how to deter a polar bear.

- Shout loudly, make noises and wave your arms to appear larger. Often that will be sufficient to scare off a polar bear.

In order to be able to fire warning shots, you should always bring a rifle when traveling in an area where a polar bear encounter is possible. The rifle should at the very least be a .30-06, so that it can be used in an **extreme emergency** where it is necessary to shoot the bear. Soft point bullets are the most effective.

When camping in areas where there might be polar bears, someone should always be on polar bear watch. The camp should be set up so sleeping tents and food storages are placed at least 50 meters apart. Waste should also be placed far from sleeping tents and food storages.

You should avoid setting up your camp in places:

- close to an active glacier
- with ridged ice (on the sea ice)
- that have gorges/crevasses along the coastline
- where there might be a polar bear den nearby
- that show traces of polar bear activity such as paw prints, fresh droppings, carcasses, etc.
- where there are elements that may impair your hearing, e.g. a river.

## Polar bears close to towns and settlements

When a polar bear is approaching a populated area, attempts should be made to scare it off by firing warning shots, flare guns, etc. Boats, snowmobiles or ATV's may be used to scare the polar bear off. Drive off the polar bear at a slow pace (only a few km/h). Polar bears can quickly overheat.

In the event that one or more polar bears approach town or settlement areas, the police or the municipal authorities are to be contacted, as the discharge of firearms is not permitted in town and settlement areas. The Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture shall also be contacted.

When one or more polar bears are scared off close to but outside of town or settlement areas, the Ministry and the local Wildlife and Fisheries Officer shall be contacted.

In any case, you must abide by the orders issued by the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture, the police, the local Wildlife and Fisheries Officer and municipal authorities.

## "Problem bears" in populated areas

"Problem bears" are polar bears that repeatedly, in spite of being driven off, return to populated areas.



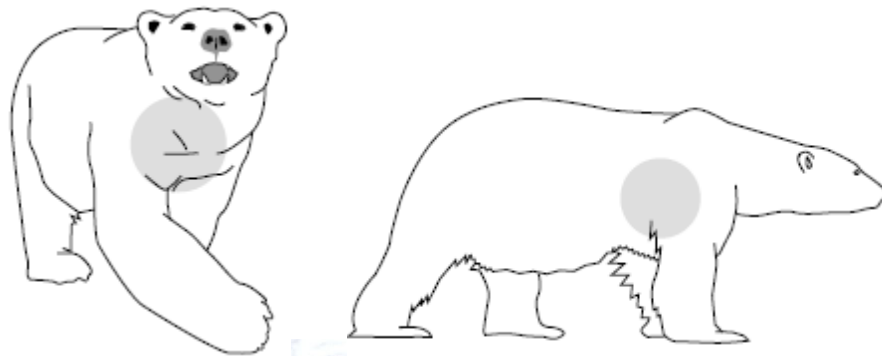
### License to kill problem bears

You may **only** kill a problem bear outside of populated areas with license from the Ministry, or, in populated areas with license from the police. The option of killing a polar bear is an absolute last resort, and the Ministry in collaboration with relevant parties will decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not it is necessary to put the animal down.

Requests to put problem bears down shall be sent to the Ministry and must be documented in detail. To be included:

- Photographs of damages,
- eye-witness accounts
- Photographs of the bear(s) in question.

As a rule, police, municipal authorities, a Wildlife and Fisheries Officer, or someone appointed by the Ministry or the police is in charge of the killing.



*Recommended shot placement on polar bears (source: [www.sysselmannen.no](http://www.sysselmannen.no))*

### In case you have had to put down a problem bear

- Notify the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture **as quickly as possible** (phone number 34 53 04 / 55 33 42 / 48 25 20)
- Be aware, there are instructions mandating that the problem bear's remains are to be **surrendered**. The Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture are in charge of the further handling of the case.

### Concerning polar bear cubs and young polar bears

According to current regulations, cubs and females with cubs are totally protected.

Polar bear cubs are born in dens during the winter, around the beginning of January. When a cub is approximately 2 years old it is usually weaning from its mother. Regardless of gender, it will be approximately the same size as the mother.

**In other words**, if the cub is NOT the same size as the mother, it is approximately 1 year old, and will not be able to fend for itself.



If the cub measures approximately 1 meter from snout to tail, it is approximately 1 year old, and will likely be dependent on its mother. If standing on all four legs it is about 1 meter tall, it would be about 1.5 - 2 meters tall upright, and could already be about 2 years old and able to fend for itself.

A young polar bear is more likely to get close to people. They are inexperienced hunters and more often than not desperately hungry. However, young polar bears are usually more easily driven off.

There is no significant difference in size between male and female polar bear cubs in the first year. Measured in March-April, the length measured in a straight line from snout to tail of 1-year-old polar bear cubs in Greenland is approximately 147 centimeters, while 2-year-olds measure approximately 172 centimeters. The 2-year-olds are about the same length as their mothers.

(Source: Greenland Institute of Natural Resources)

For more information please get in touch with Head of Division Amalie Jessen, Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture, telephone no.: 34 53 04 / 55 33 42, e-mail: [amalie@nanoq.gl](mailto:amalie@nanoq.gl)  
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