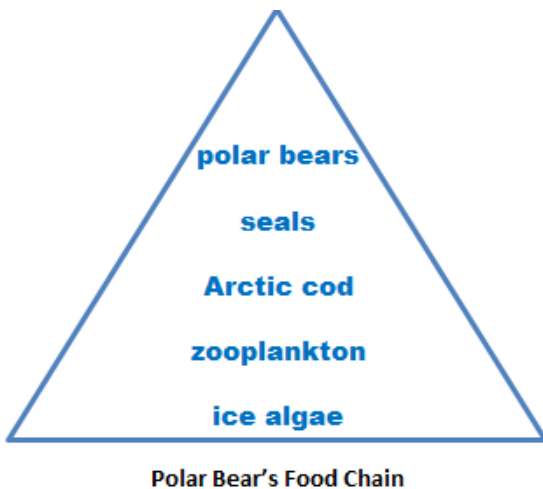


What Happens When the Ice is Gone?

In recent years, people have become aware of how climate change is affecting animals in the Arctic. The Earth is becoming warmer. The effects of this warming can especially be seen in the Arctic, as the ice caps are beginning to melt.

The ice caps are made from sea ice, which differs from the ice over land. Less sea ice is a problem for all of life in the Arctic. Polar bears rely on this ice for many things

When the sea ice melts, the platforms made up of sea ice move farther apart. This makes it more dangerous for polar bears to swim from platform to platform. Also, polar bears have less food. This might seem strange, but makes sense if you understand the polar bear's food web.



Imagine a triangle as the polar bear's food chain. At the bottom of the triangle are ice algae. Ice algae live in pockets in the ice and are found on the underside of sea ice.

On the next layer of the triangle is the zooplankton, a relative of shrimp. These tiny creatures cannot swim, so they drift in bodies of water. Zooplankton eats the ice algae. These two layers of the triangle are the biggest, because sea algae and zooplankton are so tiny, it takes millions of them to provide enough food for their part of the food chain.



Still another layer of our food chain triangle is a type of fish called the Arctic cod. You guessed it! The Arctic cod eat zooplankton. These fish have a special material in their bodies that keeps them from freezing.

As the animals of the food chain get larger, there are fewer of them needed to feed the next layer. The Arctic cod is a main food source for seals. You probably have seen them dive off rocks to catch fish. You may also have seen them catch fish in their mouths as places like Sea World, or a zoo. Seals can eat 28-35 pounds of fish a day!

Finally, the top layer of this food chain is the polar bear. Seals are the polar bear's main source of food. A 121 pound seal would provide food for a polar bear for about eight days.



Scientists are concerned that as the ice caps melt, this whole food chain triangle will disappear. All of the living parts of an ecosystem depend on one another. Any change makes a difference to all the creatures. Ecosystems must stay in balance for the plants and animals in it to survive.

Polar bears are already endangered. Now, if the ice algae have no ice to live on, the zooplanktons have nothing to eat. If there are no zooplanktons, the Arctic cod goes hungry. Without the Arctic cod, seals will suffer.

Now you see on why ice is more than a place to sleep for the polar bear.

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