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### THE POLAR BEAR.

The Polar or White Bear is the largest, strongest, most powerful and, next to the Grizzly, the most ferocious of bears. Its home is in the Polar regions of eternal frosts and snows, where the whiteness of its fur is of double service to it for warmth and to conceal it from its prey. It is different from all other bears in having the soles of its feet covered with close-set hairs—a beautiful instance of special adaptation to the wants of the creature, it being thereby enabled to walk more securely on the slippery ice. Its food consists chiefly of seals and fish, in pursuit of which it shows great power of swimming and diving and a considerable degree of sagacity. It also feeds on the carcasses of whales and on birds and their eggs, and also is said to eat berries when these can be had.

The Polar bear is a strong swimmer, Captain Sabine having found one swimming powerfully forty miles from the nearest shore, and with no ice in sight to afford it rest. They often are carried on floating ice to great distances, and to more southern latitudes than their own, no fewer than twelve having been known to reach Ireland in this way during one winter.

Though he attacks man when hungry, wounded or provoked, he will not injure him when food more to his liking is at hand. Sir Francis McClintock relates an anecdote of a native of Upernavik who was out one dark winter's day visiting his seal-nets. He found a seal entangled, and whilst kneeling down over it upon the ice to get it clear, he received a slap on his back—from his companion as he supposed; but a second and heavier blow made him look smartly round. He was horror-stricken to see a peculiarly grim old bear instead of his comrade. Without taking further notice of the man, Bruin tore the seal out of the net, and began his supper. He was not interrupted, nor did the man wait to see the meal finished, fearing no doubt that his uninvited and unceremonious guest might keep a

corner for him. Many instances have been observed of peculiar sagacity of the Polar bear. Scoresby relates that the captain of a whaler, being anxious to procure a bear without wounding the skin, made trial of the stratagem of laying the noose of a rope in the snow and placing a piece of kreg, or whale's carcass, within it. A bear, ranging the neighboring ice, was soon enticed to the spot. Approaching the bait, he seized it in his mouth, but his foot, at the same moment,

by a jerk of the rope, being entangled in the noose, he pushed it off with the adjoining paw, and deliberately retired. After having eaten the piece he carried away with him he returned. The noose, with another piece of kreg, being then replaced, he pushed the rope aside, and again walked triumphantly off with the kreg. A third time the noose was laid, and this time the rope was buried in the snow, and the bait laid in a deep hole dug in the centre. But Bruin, after snuffing

about the place for a few minutes, scraped the snow away with his paw, then threw the rope aside and escaped unhurt with his prize.

The she-bear is taught by a wonderful instinct to shelter her young under the snow. Toward the month of December she retreats to the side of a rock, where, by dint of scraping and allowing the snow to fall upon her, she forms a cell in which to reside during the winter. There is no fear that she should be

stifled for want of air, for the warmth of her breath always keeps a small passage open, and the snow, instead of forming a thick uniform sheet, is broken by a little hole, round which is collected a mass of glittering hoar-frost, caused by the congelation of the breath. Within this strange nursery she produces her young, and remains with them beneath the snow until the month of March when she emerges into the open air with her baby bears. As the time passes on, the breath of the family, together with the warmth exhaled from their bodies, serve to enlarge the cell, so that with their increasing dimensions the accommodation is increased to suit them. As the only use of the snow-burrow is to shelter the young, the male bears do not hibernate like the female, but roam freely about during the winter months. Before retiring under the snow the bear eats enormously, and driven by an unerring instinct resorts to the most nutritious diet, so that she becomes prodigiously fat, thus laying in an internal store of alimentary matter which enables her not only to support her own life but to suckle her young during her long seclusion without taking a morsel of food. By an admirable provision of nature the young are of wonderfully small dimensions when compared with the parent, and as their growth, so long as they remain confined in their crystal nursery, is remarkably slow, they consequently need but little food and space.

The Polar bear is armed with formidable weapons, and a proportionate power to use them. His claws are two



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