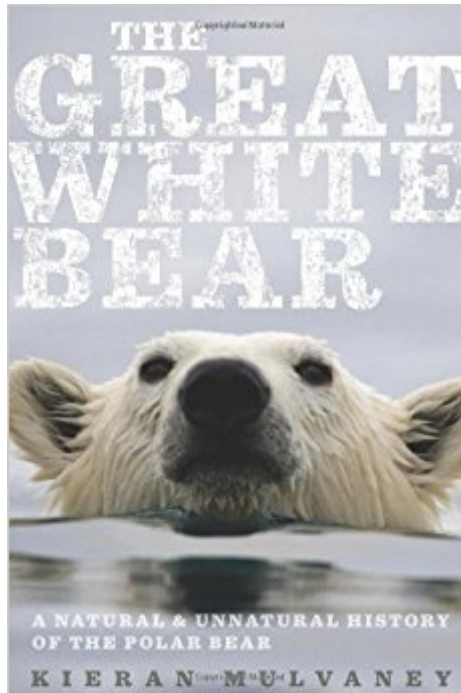




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The Great White Bear: A Natural And Unnatural History Of The Polar Bear



Synopsis

Polar bears are creatures of paradox: They are white bears whose skin is black; massive predators who can walk almost silently; Arctic residents whose major problem is not staying warm, but keeping cool. Fully grown they can measure 10 feet and weigh close to 2,000 pounds, but at birth they are just 20 ounces. Creatures that may wander thousands of miles over the course of a year, they begin life in a snowdrift. Human encounters with these legendary beasts are cause for both excitement and apprehension. Tales throughout history describe the ferocity of polar bear attacks on humans; but human hunting of polar bears has exacted a far larger toll, obliging Arctic nations to try to protect their region's iconic species before it's too late. Now, however, another threat to the polar bears' survival has emerged, one that is steadily removing sea ice and the life it supports. Without this habitat, polar bears cannot exist. The Great White Bear celebrates the story of this unique species. Through a blend of history, both natural and human, through myth and reality and observations both personal and scientific, Kieran Mulvaney masterfully provides a context for readers to consider the polar bear, its history, its life, and its uncertain fate.

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Customer Reviews

When author Mulvaney joined an expedition on the icebreaker Arctic Sunrise, he planned to watch polar bears on the ice along the Alaskan shoreline, but most of the ice was gone. After days of searching, he finally saw an emaciated bear swimming far at sea. Such may be the fate of the species if global warming continues unabated, for the polar bear is a marine mammal that lives

more on ocean ice than on land, hunting seals and scavenging beached whales. The author found more bears in Churchill, Manitoba, but they were stranded waiting longer each year for the ice to form on Hudson Bay. Mixing historical accounts, research data, and his own observations, Mulvaney skillfully describes the harsh nomadic life of polar bears. Readers who enjoy nature writing will appreciate this sympathetic report on the endangered state of the great white bear.

--Rick Roche

KIERAN MULVANEY is the author of *At the Ends of the Earth: A History of the Polar Regions* and *The Whaling Season: The Struggle to Stop Commercial Whaling*. He has traveled extensively in the Arctic and Antarctic. He has written for the *Washington Post Magazine*, the *Guardian*, *New Scientist*, and *BBC Wildlife* and is a correspondent for *Discovery News* and *Reuters*.

I love to take a trip to the polar regions in the heat of the Summer, by book that is. This Summer Kieran Mulvaney was nice enough to escort me on a tour of the Arctic with the particular purpose of learning about and understanding the polar bear in his book *The Great White Bear*. I always love finding out more about animals and have been interested in polar bears and their welfare, but really wasn't that well informed. It seemed like a great opportunity to read a book about polar bears by a journalist and environmental activist such as Kieran Mulvaney. I wasn't disappointed as *The Great White Bear* is easily readable for the non-scientist. One can learn much about the habits, the biology and the impact that the changing arctic landscape has on the polar bear. I was delighted to learn about the hunting habits of this great wandering bear. I found it intriguing to learn that this bear is deliberately slow lest it overheat. That and many other interesting tidbits can be found in this book. Also worth reading are the many "bear stories" and I really liked the ones which were set in Churchill. Here is one which I found entertaining: Next to us sat Bill Callahan, American by birth but a resident of Churchill for twenty-eight years. He, too, had a bear story. Evidently, a community of 800 people is, for Bill somewhat suffocating, so he lives in a cabin outside of town. It makes for plenty of peace and quiet; but he says, "I sometimes get some interesting visitors." One night the previous year, a sow with cubs had pushed through his front door and entered his kitchen while he slept. Placing her paw on the stove in an apparent attempt to reach a loaf of bread that was above it the sow pressed the button that lit the burner, singed her paw, recoiled banged into the wall and crashed out through the now open doorway, cubs in tow. Having somehow dozed through the breaking down of his door and the presence of three polar bears in his kitchen, Bill was awakened by the sound of the sow thumping into the kitchen wall. Fully naked but half-conscious, he stood in

the kitchen doorway, the chaos not fully apparent to him, the scene lit only by the glow from the stove, prompting Bill initially to wonder how he could have gone to bed and left the gas flame burning. I believe that it is the wonderful mix of bear stories with the facts and details about the polar bears' life, environment and biology which make this book so readable. I read it as quickly as a novel and yet the wonder of the arctic and the polar bear have stayed with me. I would encourage anyone with an interest in polar bears to read it.

At times it went from one topic to another without much connection. Despite this the book was very informative and understandable-

Interesting and informative. A good precursor for a visit to polar bear country.

nice book thank you

Love this amazing book! There is a section on Churchill and the Tundra Buggies that makes you feel like you are there. If you love this species, you will love this book!

Love Polar Bears so this book is a must.

The great white bear was an excellent source of the information necessary to come to a verdict concerning the results of being first in line to be effected by mans lack of concern for our planet.

A captivating read. Without a dry paragraph in sight, Kieran Mulvaney weaves together history, zoology, myth, anecdote, science and a touch of credible anthropomorphism and captures the life of the polar bear, its relationship to humans and environment, and the dispiriting facts about the bears' possible future. Curiously, what stuck with me - and that I find the most chilling of all facts that Kieran documents - has nothing to do with the bears, although I learned much and his writing has inspired me to learn more. But rather this fact, tucked away near the end of the book, grips me with dread. As Kieran relays it, in the late 1800's a Swedish scientist, Svante Arrhenius realised that a small increase in carbon dioxide might warm up the atmosphere sufficiently to allow it to hold more water vapor, which in turn would lead to further warming (p185). He also recognised that such increases could be caused by Industrial processes. Global temperatures could increase by as much as 8 or 9 F. But, based on the emissions at the time, he predicated that such increases would not eventuate

for at least 2000 years. (p185). In around less than 200 years, man-made warming appears to be happening, and much more quickly than the scientist predicted. This recount reminds me that our predictions are so often way off, sometimes for the benefit (as in, a medical breakthrough happening earlier than first predicted), but can also be diabolical. Through the educational and inspirational works of people like Kieran, here's hoping we can all be moved just a little bit more to care about the planet. Starting with less plastic.

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