

<http://www.npolar.no/en/news/2015/12-23-counting-of-polar-bears-in-svalbard.html>

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Polar bears in Svalbard in good condition – so far

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The Norwegian Polar Institute has carried out a counting of polar bears in Svalbard, financed by the Ministry of Climate and Environment. The results show that there are probably more polar bears than the last time the bears were counted in this area in 2004, in spite of the fact that there have been many years with poor ice cover during this period.



The Barents Sea polar bear population was counted over 4 weeks in autumn 2015, in Svalbard and in Norwegian parts of the Barents Sea. Photo: Jon Aars / Norwegian Polar Institute

"The Barents Sea Bears" migrate between Norwegian and Russian territory. Polar bears on the Russian side were included in the previous counting, but as the Russians did not take part this time, the results are uncertain. The scientists now estimate that there are around 975 polar bears in the Norwegian region, whereas they estimated a number of 685 in 2004.

– The bears were in good physical condition, said polar bear scientist Jon Aars of the Norwegian Polar Institute. The ice conditions were good this last year, and so the availability of food has been good. But should there be several years in a row with poor ice conditions, this may be of major consequences for the polar bears. – A rise in the population does not come as a big surprise, as population numbers previously have been low due to the fact that these bears were hunted until 40 years ago, Dr. Aars added.

The trend for the ice cover in the Arctic is that it is diminishing in extent as well as in thickness. It is expected that the ice conditions will have a further negative trend, which will be a challenge for ice-dependent species such as polar bears.

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