INUIT KNOWLEDGE PROJECT REPORT
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ELDER CORNELIUS NUTARAK SENIOR’S
TEACHINGS ABOUT POLAR BEAR BEHAVIOUR:
A FOCUS ON SAFETY

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A PUBLICATION
OF
PARKS CANADA’S NUNAVUT FIELD UNIT
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Cover Photos:
The series of drawings are stills from video shot by Brian Koonoo, Dec. 2005. The drawings depicted in the shots are the original drawings of Cornelius Nutarak, Sr. Photo: Lorna Ootoova Kilukishak and Cornelius Nutarak, Sr., still from video shot by Brian Koonoo, Dec. 2005.

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A podcast that is a companion to this written report can be accessed at:
http://ikpodcasts.lecol-ck.ca
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PARKS CANADA’S NUNAVUT FIELD UNIT

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Introduction

The “Inuit Knowledge Project” is one of two national park projects across Canada that received significant funding over a five year period to carry out traditional knowledge studies. This project has allowed in-depth thinking on how to use both traditional knowledge and science to develop a better understanding of arctic ecosystems and in turn help Parks Canada to enhance the ecological integrity of three arctic national parks: Auyuittuq, Sirmilik and Ukkusiksalik National Parks.

Cornelius Nutarak, Sr. was one of the Pond Inlet elders who advised Parks Canada on the creation of the Inuit Knowledge Project. This report focuses on Elder Cornelius Nutarak Senior’s teachings about polar bear behaviour. Mr. Nutarak worried that young people in his home community of Pond Inlet and tourists to the area were unaware of how to read polar bear behaviour and to recognize the dangerous situations they may place themselves in when traveling in areas frequented by polar bears. A podcast that supplements this report is available online at www.lecol-ck.ca.

Following discussions with park staff and university researchers, Mr. Nutarak decided to participate in a research initiative to record some of his knowledge of the polar bears of north Baffin Island. He focused on documenting his observations of polar bear behaviour in the context of his experiences as a hunter. The following report outlines much of the material about polar bears that he shared during interview sessions in 2005 and 2006. Mr. Nutarak passed away before this report could be written. The material was reviewed with the Pond Inlet Inuit...
Knowledge Project Working Group and Mr. Nutarak’s eldest son, Mr. Jayko Aooloo.

Cornelius Nutarak, Sr. was a respected elder who lived in the Pond Inlet area for most of his life. Pond Inlet is located on northeastern Baffin Island, more than 600 km north of the Arctic Circle in Canada’s Inuit territory of Nunavut.
Mittimatalik / Pond Inlet

The official Inuktitut name of Pond Inlet is Mittimatalik. This name may refer to “the resting place of Mittima,” an elder who passed away in the area long ago, and/or refer to a large rock near the town site used as a landing place by gulls fishing in the area.
An older name for Pond Inlet is Tununiq, which means "a place that faces away from the sun." Nestled on the shores of Eclipse Sound, the town site of Pond Inlet faces the impressive mountains and glaciers of Bylot Island to the north and is surrounded to the south by the hills and mountains of the Arctic cordillera. With a population of just over 1300 people, 95 percent are Inuit and Inuktitut is the language most commonly used in the community. The Pond Inlet area has been a hunting and fishing site for the Inuit and their ancestors for more than 4000 years.

Born in 1924, Mr. Nutarak lived in the Pond Inlet area for all but four years of his life before passing away in 2007 at the age of 83. He worked for decades documenting and sharing the knowledge of his ancestors and his elders as well as his daily observations of life and environmental change. Moreover, Mr. Nutarak was involved in extensive archaeological research. Mr. Nutarak received a number of awards and recognitions for his work including the Inuit Heritage Trust’s Elders Recognition Award, an award recognizing his contributions to...
Nunavut culture from the Nunavut Commissioner.
Mr. Nutarak was also inducted as a member of the Order of Canada in 2006.

The following report is based on interviews carried out in the last two years of his life. Two of Mr. Nutarak's grandchildren, Lorna Ootoova Kilukishak and Brian Koonoo (past and present Parks Canada employees) conducted these interviews along with two university researchers. We can all attest to Mr. Nutarak's tremendous intelligence, stamina, patience and good humour. He almost always outlasted us during interview sessions and we were all 40-50 years his juniors.

As a member of Pond Inlet's Elders Committee, Mr. Nutarak helped guide the development of Parks Canada's Inuit Knowledge Project. After a series of conversations between Mr. Nutarak, Parks Canada staff and university researchers involved with the Inuit Knowledge Project, Mr. Nutarak expressed an interest in reviewing his extensive journals in order to share his observations of polar bear movements, distribution, behaviour and his encounters with the animals. Mr. Nutarak expressly voiced his wish that this knowledge be made accessible to the public, and especially to the youth of his home community of Pond Inlet.
Nutarak had a great deal of experience observing and learning from bears and this knowledge was almost invariably accumulated during hunting activities. During the interviews this report is based upon, Mr. Nutarak often spoke from his experiences approaching bears with his dog-team.

An Ancient Relationship: Inuit, Polar Bears and Dogs

The relationship between human beings and dogs has existed in the arctic for at least 1,000 years. Inuit sled dogs still play a vital role in keeping hunters safe on the land. The Government of Nunavut does not allow polar bear hunts without the use of a dog-team. In Nunavut, individual communities receive a finite number of “tags” which limit the number of bears that can be hunted in one year. The number of tags available for the hunt of polar bears varies widely in each community depending on the state of the bear population in the area where the community is located. A recent study in Nunavut found that the odds of any one hunter receiving a tag varied from once every 6 years to once every three decades depending upon the status of the bear subpopulation closest to the community where the hunter lives.

Hunters in the Pond Inlet area have hunted polar bears for subsistence purposes for countless generations. The Inuit recognize the polar bear as an animal of great intelligence not to be ridiculed or underestimated. Non-Inuit often find it hard to comprehend how the continued hunt of the polar bear, an animal that is considered world-wide to be an icon of the arctic, is emblematic of ancient and treasured
relationships between the Inuit and arctic animals considered their spiritual equals. Equally incomprehensible to Inuit is an insistence that the polar bear hunt is antiquated and unnecessary.

The hunt epitomizes the links between the Inuit and the arctic environment. The meat of bears is consumed and skins are still used as clothing and bedding with insulative properties that the very best of synthetically-produced extreme cold weather gear cannot duplicate. Paradoxically, the lifestyles of most non-Inuit leave them heavily dependent on food and goods transported from thousands of miles away, a way of life that is making major contributions to the climate change that is the primary threat to the survival of the polar bear.

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Report Outline

This report begins with a description of selected aspects of the life cycle of polar bears in the north Baffin Island area and an outline of denning areas that Mr. Nutarak observed throughout his lifetime. The report continues with descriptions of various polar bear behaviours, from the signs of non-threatening bears through to the signs of extremely dangerous bears. Mr. Nutarak bases most of these descriptions on his own experiences of bears while hunting and travelling with a dog team. This report also describes the relationship between hunters and their dog-teams during bear hunts and means of defense against attacking bears.
Mr. Nutarak begins by describing some aspects of the life cycle of polar bears in the north Baffin area. Many of his comments centre on his observations of bears in the Button Point area of Bylot Island and along the Baffin coastline stretching from the Pond Inlet area to the community of Clyde River.

I had my own dog team from the time I was an able young man. I didn’t catch many polar bears, but I have hunted polar bears and I have seen polar bears. I want to describe the experiences that I have seen and that are still alive within me. I have not forgotten them to this day even when I am no longer able to hunt, but I want to tell you about these experiences.

We know this time of the month in November, the female polar bears that are now expecting after mating early this year will start heading up land to start making a den. Some of the polar bears, especially the young ones who are expecting for the first time, will be heading to the land a bit too late and will deliver their cubs out in the open. When that happens they will put their brand new cubs in their mouths with their little snouts sticking out and they will head up land to make a den, at this time of the month. I am sure it is happening now in the month of November, because they start heading up land to burrow into their dens.

Nutarak describes an intestinal plug, created when female bears eat grasses before denning:

In oral history it is said that you can see an interior lining of ice in the den formed by the heat of the polar bear. I myself have not seen the inside of a den, but that is the traditional history. When a polar bear makes it up land to where there is lots of snow in the month of November, she will make a den and once inside she will start to fast and every month she will dig in a bit further and will not leave the den at all for months. Polar bears will make an anal plug before settling in their dens and will not defecate for the duration of their stay. The plug is made of a big clump of soil and grass mixed together and it is only once they go back to the sea ice that they will defecate out that plug.

They enter their dens in November, make a plug of soil and grass, start to fast and will continue to fast for the months of December, January, February, and March. March is when they say the den now has an opening, but the polar bears will not head back to the sea. They will remain in their dens so their cubs can now start to play outside near the opening. It is in the month of April that they will start heading back to the sea and once they make it to the sea ice they will defecate...
the plug. I have seen a plug myself. I found it while I was hunting. But those are the months that they will stay inside the den and will fast the whole duration of their stay in their dens.

Lucy L. J. B. "Yearlings are almost a year old. It is quite common for the cubs to have grown quite big or when the cubs are large, almost as big as their mothers. Females do not mate right away. It is only when their mothers are fully grown yearlings, but they will still wait for their mothers and referred to as nalliqtigiit cubs. They will remain with their mothers for some time: wait for her to come out from the den to the sea. They remain with their mothers for a long time, they wait for the mother near the shore of the location where she is denning. I caught a yearling with Piugattualuk that was waiting for its mother to come out of her den. The polar bear was already huge, almost just as big as its mother. The mother was denning near the shore somewhere on the land. Females do not mate right after they return from the dens.

Nutarak speaks of the learning that cubs must gain from their mothers. Although as large as their mothers at one year of age, and referred to as nalliqtigiit cubs. They will remain with their mothers for some time.

When the female polar bears come back to the sea ice after denning for months they do not mate right away. It is only when their cubs have grown quite big or when the cubs are almost a year old. It is quite common for a female polar bear to have another yearling waiting for her to come out from the den to the sea.
The cubs will wait for their mother to finish hibernating because they still have a bit of learning to do. Just before they turn one year old, they are full-grown, the same size as their mother.

The northeast coast of Baffin Island and Bylot Island are rich in polar bear denning sites. Mr. Nutarak describes a particular trip along the Baffin coastline between Pond Inlet and Clyde River when he was a teenager when he observed the tracks of many female bears and cubs emerging from their upland dens and heading toward the sea ice:

There are many topics to talk about concerning polar bears. There are bears with dens, those going back to stay in their dens, and those returning to the sea ice from their dens. Each bear’s situation is unique. Some denning bears may be with cubs and some without. It is not common for many bears to return to the sea from their dens [at the same time], but there was one time when my parents and I were travelling by dog team and our plans were to travel to Clyde River with the Anglican minister. We started our trip from Pond Inlet and took a detour to Arctic Bay we stayed overnight at the local camp. The next day we had just left and went to the other side of the community when we found fresh polar bear tracks with cub prints in them. Our dogs could smell them but we just left them alone. All in one day we came across many polar bear tracks with cub tracks in them. There must have been many cubs born that year because it is unusual to come across many tracks in a single day. Just before we reached the community of Clyde River, that’s when we finally stopped seeing bear prints. That was the time we travelled to Uqqurmut, towards Clyde River, with the Anglican Minister.

Mr Nutarak welcomed questions, and made a great effort to communicate what he knew about polar bear behaviour with drawings, recognizing that some young people and non-Inuit might better retain information shared in a visual rather than an oral format. Mr. Nutarak was a powerful communicator and his oral descriptions are rich with detail even without the aid of his drawings. Readers interested in hearing Mr. Nutarak describe these behaviours in his own voice can do so by accessing the podcast that accompanies this report at http://www.lecolck.ca.
Before Mr. Nutarak describes the details of polar bear behaviours he relates his motivations for documenting his knowledge and experiences of bears:

http://www.ikpodcasts.lecol-ck.ca
A person can have so many questions about polar bears. I won’t be able to talk about all the behaviours of the polar bear, but I want to talk about the most important things people should know. I have made illustrations about polar bear behaviours. They may not be the best illustrations, but you will be able to see them and that way you can understand and answer the questions you have about polar bear behaviours yourself; “so that is why they are like that,” or say to yourself, “that is how they look when they are behaving a certain way,” or you will know they are showing aggression when they behave a certain way. That is what I want to show you. I want to emphasize though that you still have to be cautious because there are many more behaviours that we don’t know. These are a few examples when I am talking about polar bear behaviors and these are just examples of signs I want people to know so people will start to understand how they can be. When students are learning they learn a bit faster when they have more explanation or something that they can see. I have tried to be a bit broader, trying to put myself into a student’s position, a qallunaat’s [non-Inuk] position or an Inuk’s position, so the person who is reading or hearing my explanations can learn more that way.

I want to say before I go on, I’m not trying to scare anyone. I just want to make sure I am passing on knowledge to the future generation, the youth, because polar bears must be treated with much respect. I want people to know about polar bear behaviours so that the younger generation will have the ability to identify and understand polar bear behaviours.
When a person is lacking knowledge, especially in this day and age when the youth can just take off to the land on their own, most of them with no knowledge of polar bear behaviour, they are certainly putting themselves in danger. Especially the younger generations of today, they do not know the different behaviours of bears, and how a bear could react to them. It is imperative to let people know they are putting themselves in danger, you always have to watch out and be aware of polar bears. Even though we have much better snowmobiles and guns, as soon as a polar bear sees you he will certainly come and check you out.

My worry is the youth are now brought up and taught only in an educational facility. They don't have this kind of knowledge anymore. They do not even know that when they are out there, the bears could be detecting their scent from miles away. They do not have these thoughts anymore, that animals can smell them from a long distance. It seems as though they are putting themselves at risk, especially if they go out alone. What would happen if their skidoos broke down? A polar bear could approach them and do anything to them. If you do not know anything about bear behaviours, you are putting yourself at risk if you do not know what to do. So it's really important to at least have a sense of the bear's behaviour and what it could do. It's okay if you go out with someone who has the experience and knows these behaviours. But if a person is alone out there, it seems like they're putting themselves at risk. It's more like that now because young people don't really know the behaviours of bears.

Mr. Nutarak describes a full range of polar bear behaviours, reminding us that people must always remain extremely careful whenever they encounter a bear, but pointing out the differences between non-threatening and/or curious bears and the extreme danger of approaching females with cubs, bears during mating season or hungry or feeding bears and finishes by describing the outright aggression of bears intent on attack.

No matter where you are you are always have to be aware of the wind direction, which direction is it coming from? There is a traditional law that you are not to approach a bear when the wind is carrying your scent to the bear. It was forbidden to hunt when the wind was coming from your back towards the polar bear. They say they can be way more aggressive and can attack the dog team or humans as soon as they can smell a scent.
Every behaviour that Nutarak describes is a behaviour that he himself has witnessed:

When a polar bear is behaving in a certain way it seems like he will put on the brakes - tukirujjuq - and he will not come any closer, but will suddenly stop himself from coming any further. When you hear a story [about this behaviour] often someone will describe the story like this, “The bear looks like he is going to charge right towards you, but he just puts on the brakes – ‘tukirutijuq’ - and instead backs away.” I am describing some of the behaviours that I saw polar bears exhibit when I was out hunting. I will not describe anything that I have not experienced. All the behaviours that I will explain are things that I have experienced and seen before.

Mr. Nutarak begins by describing the signs of a curious bear:

Bears automatically prey on anything around them. They don’t even know they are doing that, they walk searching and smelling the surroundings as they are walking. When a bear senses a presence or sees a dog-team in front of him, he will go straight ahead to find out because he is curious, he will come straight towards you. Sometimes his head goes up and he looks around and tries to recognize what he is seeing. Just like this, just checking out his curiosity, that is what we say, and once he gets close enough, he will stop or sometimes he will go on his hind legs and stand up. They are very curious animals. That is why they start to come towards you even if you are not disturbing them. He cannot even hear you, but he can see you. Because they are predators they want to know what is there, they are looking out for themselves, that is what we call the curious bear.
Nutarak then highlights the signs of bears acting to protect themselves, but unlikely to proceed to an attack:

This type of bear, if it is laying flat on its stomach with its front feet extended forward, that means that it will probably just scare the dogs, but it won’t attack as long as its front feet are extended forward like that and its back legs are lying flat. The bear won’t attack, and he won’t get any closer. The bear will just try and scare anything around it, but it won’t attack.

There is also a different kind of bear, the behaviour is nothing like the curious bear. It will charge right towards you ‘surjuaktuq.' When we say ‘surjuatuinaqtuq’ the bear is charging at you to scare you away and will not come any closer. His paws will be set in a certain way, he will charge right towards you and suddenly stop “tukirutijuq” putting on the brakes. He will not come any closer even towards the dogs or humans. If his paws are set in position on the ice. He will charge towards you to scare you away then all of a sudden stop, you can even hear him grunt and growl as he is charging towards you, but you know he will not come any closer.
This kind of bear, if he's like that with his paws up, he's stopping himself. Even if he's scared he won't attack, he'll probably just back up, he'll probably just leave if he's this kind of bear... Most polar bears are scary, but if you recognize a bear like that, it's not as scary as the other ones. As long as the paws are like that. The bear's ears won't be as open as the aggressive bears. The bear will make noises and try and scare the dogs, but he won't get close to them. He'll probably walk a bit towards them, but he won't get as close as the other bears. These kinds of bears would be okay.

Mr. Nutarak describes the signs of aggressive or dangerous bears, including the differences between the signs of a bear that feels threatened or is intent on attack. He also describes the dangers of bears that are hungry, talks about curious young male bears, and notes that older male bears can be virtually “unstoppable.”
When a person sees a polar bear, he really has to look at the bear, and understand what the behaviour is. One of the things that Inuit check is a bear’s ears, if the polar bear’s ears are opened up a bit, that means it’s an aggressive bear, that’s a very dangerous bear. That is one sign for a person to see and to recognize already that the bear is a really aggressive and dangerous bear. So when you see a bear for the first time you have to look at its ears. Some bears are acclimatized to people and some bears are not used to being around people at all.

Polar bears are very intelligent, especially the old polar bear bulls: “Angujjuat.” They can no longer run, they just walk in long strides. When they are being pursued when it is not a mating season, they will just look back and will try to get away. They will just take one long jump as if to start running and that will be the only time they will attempt to run. When the old bulls - the Angujjuat - are being pursuit by dog-team it takes a very long time before the dogs can stop the bear from moving. That is the way they behave.

There are huge polar bears, angujjuat [old bulls]. Besides those, there are male bears that are a bit smaller and skinner. The skinnier male polar bears are the ones that are more aggressive and more scary. And male cubs, those that are between the ages of a small cub and a teenager, they are more active than other polar bears, so they can be more aggressive and more naive. Their behaviour is a bit different.

Once a bear smells food, even if he sees something he’s never seen before, a curious bear won’t be scared of anything. A hungry bear can easily attack and kill even a full-grown person. That’s why everybody is usually informed when there’s a polar bear in the community so that they can scare them off. However, even if the community scares such a bear off, once they smell something, they’ll come back, even if it’s in the middle of the night. It’s that smell that he takes one long jump as if to start running and that will be the only time they will attempt to run. When the old bulls - the Angujjuat - are being pursuit by dog-team it takes a very long time before the dogs can stop the bear from moving. That is the way they behave.
Bears are more aggressive when there’s food around. When he is eating his seal catch or eating the carcass of a narwhal he will be very aggressive. He can charge right at you. Because he doesn’t want to share his food we call him “Niqainngujuq.” He can attack you even if he is full. That is the way polar bears are. They can be very dangerous when they are eating, and when they charge towards you they will not suddenly stop, they will attack without a wink. That is survival. The polar bear’s instinct. Eating to survive.

When a polar bear is able to dig his claws into the ice while dogs are attacking him, the polar bear will position himself in a crouching position ready to attack. It is called “Nanuqqijaallaktuq.” There are several terms that are used to describe that depending on the dialect. It is also called “Qamukkaujijuq.” When he starts crouching and digging his claws into the ice he will then propel himself towards the dogs. He moves extremely fast. Even if the dogs are running away he will easily catch up with them. It is just like skiers with poles the way they propel themselves forward. His front legs are like poles and the rest of his body is like a sled. They are extremely fast and can easily catch the dogs that are running away when they are close enough for the bear to attack. They are extremely fast when they get into that position.
This particular bear, he’s one of the scariest types of bears, besides the one that slides on the ice, and a female with cubs. If there are a lot of dogs that attack him at the same time, he’ll probably panic only for a very brief moment, and then it only takes just moments for the polar bear to learn and to start realizing what’s going on just like that. Polar bears are always dangerous, but this kind of bear is very aggressive. They attack anything around them with their mouth wide open ready to bite.

Some polar bears are like that. Hunters try to kill this type of bear as soon as possible when they are attacking, as well as the type that dig their claws into the ice and polar bears with cubs because they fight to protect their cubs. Hunters would try to kill those types of bears right away before they do any harm to the dogs. This kind of bear will start to attack with its mouth wide open ready to attack, that is just one of the behaviours when the polar bears are attacking. There are so many different behaviours. I killed a bear like that before, but with a rifle. Thank goodness it wasn’t with a harpoon. This is a very aggressive kind of bear.

Nutarak spent a great deal of time emphasizing the extreme danger of getting too close to a female with cubs, who will go to all lengths to protect her young:
Female bears with cubs are really scary. If there’s something around them, their ears will go open and then go down a bit. They don’t want anything to touch their cubs. Female polar bears with cubs are usually very aggressive because they’re trying their best to protect their cubs.

A female bear with cubs is always trying very hard to protect her cubs, even if she is surrounded by dogs. She’s very curious and just like that she will learn what’s going on and instead of trying to attack the dogs, she will know right away to attack the hunter. She will try to go directly toward the hunter, and try to save her cubs. Even if she’s being attacked by dogs, she will still go toward the hunter.

Figure 9: Female with Cubs

Figure 10: Aggressive Female with Cub
If dogs surround a female polar bear with cubs, and she has a cub in front of her and starts walking, and the dogs are attacking, the female bear is so concerned about the cub, that she could get really aggressive or even just toss the dogs away because she’s so concerned about the cub.

The hunter has to be really aware of every movement that a female bear with cubs is making. The hunter will remain close by and strategize what to do next. He will remain close to the dogs since they are his helpers and be very aware of every action. It is very dangerous when the bears are counter-attacking. The hunter is in a very dangerous position when the attack is like that. The dogs are even flying everywhere because the bear is swiping them off the ground. The hunter is strategizing how to kill the bear while the dogs are keeping the bear from attacking him. The hunter knows while they are fighting the bear there is one dog that is trained to catch the cub that went ahead and goes after the cub and it will stop the cub from moving away any further, probably nearby in the ice ridges.

I have hunted a polar bear like that before, that is why I included it in my stories. We came across a female polar bear with a cub. The dogs surrounded the polar bear and the cub took off on its own away from the team, but there was a trained dog that went after the cub, and that is also the reason why the polar bear attacks all the dogs, swiping them off the ground. They fly all over the place because she wants to try get to her cub and protect it.

Nutarak explains that spring travel to the floe edge, a popular destination for tourists to the Pond Inlet area, can be extremely dangerous because spring-time coincides with the bears’ mating season:
across polar bears mating do not try to get any closer or disturb the polar bears when you know they are mating. Do not try to get their attention. You have to get away from them. That is the law, because they are most dangerous when they are mating. The big bulls - Angujjuat - will not die right away and will keep attacking even if they are wounded that is why they are very dangerous. Polar bears can be dangerous, but they are way more aggressive when they are mating, even if you keep shooting them they will not die right away that is why they are very dangerous. I want to warn you now if you do come across polar bears mating it is absolutely forbidden to get any closer to them and leave them alone, they are absolutely dangerous if you do you are putting yourself in dire danger.

We were always warned, using Inuit traditional law, that all animals, not just polar bears, become very dangerous and aggressive during the mating season. This warning stems all the way back, far before our recent ancestors’ time, that when an animal is mating, never get close to them. This is especially so for bears. It’s just like humans, they’re shy, they’re doing their own thing, and they don’t want to be bothered, so they can get really mad. It’s almost the same, like human thinking. My step-father Killaapik lived in the narrows where there were a lot of polar bears. He would often warn me of the dangers he had heard from his ancestors and he always reminded me if I ever heard or came across polar bears mating to make sure not to attempt to get closer to them, leave them altogether because even though we already know they are dangerous they can become way more dangerous when they are mating.
In the past, they did not try to scare polar bears, knowing that once a polar bear goes to a camp that if they just scare the bear off, and if the bear saw a seal, or smelled food, it will just come back after, later on that evening or later on that day. So in the past, once a polar bear comes to a camp, they would just shoot them right away. There were no quotas back then, they did not have limits placed on the bears that were killed. Once a polar bear is hungry he will not worry about people as long as he has food. He will not be scared of people, so they would just kill a bear coming to a camp right there.

They learned very quickly about their responsibilities. They were very observant of hunting behaviours and the more you took them hunting the more they would learn about what they need to do. When you went hunting they would be learning all the steps they have to take. When you have a dog-team you had to travel distances to look for animals to hunt. The dog-team was so observant they would not forget any place you had stopped the year before for tea. As soon as you started approaching the same area the dogs would slow down right down because they would not forget any of the places you stopped to rest the year before. So if the dogs are used to being around polar bears, they'll easily remember what they have to do to help the hunter or the owner.

After finishing his explanation of the range of polar bear behaviours, Nutarak explains in further detail the relationships between hunters, dogs and bears during polar bear encounters:

Dogs are really protective of their owners too. If they are dealing with a bear, a dog is protecting the hunter at the same time. The dogs are biting each other, and the dogs are trying to protect the hunter and their own too. Once the dogs experience that they won't forget. The dogs are really smart. They won't forget anything, even if they only see something once they always work together because they are both travelling and hunting together all the time.

When we hunted for polar bears, the dog-team would learn hunting skills very quickly, because the dogs were our hunting companions. They even knew how to behave when we were waiting at a seal hole for seal. Of course they would be our only hunting companions and they would obey their master because it was their purpose to be hunting dogs. They were your helpers when you were hunting seals. I would order them to go ahead on their own and I would be left behind on my own at a sea hole. I would often hunt on my own before my son grew up. My dogs were very disciplined because they were hunting dogs. And if you took them polar bear hunting enough times they would already know their responsibilities, we didn't have to train them.
In the past, when the Inuit didn’t have rifles, when they went out hunting for polar bears, they would normally use a harpoon or a knife. But when a hunter encounters a polar bear and gets close, the hunter would let his dogs loose and the dogs would surround the polar bear, attacking the bear, so they would normally get really aggressive. They would attack back and forth usually, but the dogs usually surround the polar bear, so the bear won’t go anywhere else. The hunter would be outside the ring of dogs, near the dogs, but not too close to the bear. He would get ready and after the dogs attacked the bear, he would attack the bear.

Figure 11: Aggressive Bear and Hunter

Nutarak continues by describing how a hunter would defend himself from a bear during an attack:
The dogs would try and tire the polar bear, and the hunter would be in front of the bear, and he would be in position, just in case the polar bear gets close to him. If you’re holding your forearm extended forward and held vertically toward the bear, the bear’s jaw is not big enough to cover your whole arm. However, if the bear bit sideways he could easily bite your arm and break it off. Only if you keep your arm perpendicular to the bear’s open mouth, he won’t be able to break it, it’s way too big for a bear to stretch its jaw around the whole length of your forearm. In the past, they would normally hunt bears this way, just with a harpoon, and dogs.

If the dogs attack a polar bear, and the bear doesn’t stop and he tries to go toward the hunter, if he’s ready to jump at the hunter, you have to realize that when he jumps, he will open his mouth with a tilted head with his bottom jaw touching his chest because it’s easier for him. Once the polar bear jumps, he’ll just open his mouth and try and bite while he’s up in the air. If he does so, the hunter would have to move toward the bear and while he’s still up in the air, that’s when the hunter will puncture the bear, while he’s still up in the air. If he’s trying to attack you, or bite you, you could just move one foot on the other side, where he’s facing.
There are still a few people that go polar bear hunting with their dogs. They bring their dogs along, and they help. But now with new technology, such as skidoos, that are very useful, they can go to different places, much faster. However, machines always break down and run out of gas. If people don’t take dogs with them, they don’t have anything to protect them if their skidoos have broken down. Everywhere you go, you can encounter polar bears. That is the scariest thing about hunting today. The hunters don’t have dogs with them every time they go out on the land. The dogs were also their sentinels when they were sleeping. People in town tend to be more worried about hunters now. What if their skidoos break down and they encounter a polar bear?

Finally, Nutarak reminds us never to underestimate the strength and intelligence of polar bears and to constantly hone our observational skills when travelling in polar bear country:

When a person sees a bear they really have to observe its behaviour first, watch what the bear is doing, what direction it is travelling toward and if the bear smells something, it usually moves towards the smell. So you really have to observe which direction the bear’s moving toward. The bear could be camouflaged by the snow too. Bears can hide between chunks of ice. Even if a bear appears to have moved far into the distance, you have to be careful because they can sneak up to get close to you. So you have to watch out from every direction, and observe what the bear is doing, especially around the
floe edge area, you really have to be aware of whether there are any bears around.

I would like to let everybody know, especially the tourists that come here, that they should be really aware that with so many glaciers around here, that means that there could be polar bears emerging from their dens. They should know that if they are just travelling by kayak or exploring, they could encounter a polar bear just about anywhere. They need to be especially aware of hungry bears.

We hope you have enjoyed this report. Further reports featuring Mr. Nutarak’s knowledge are available as well as podcasts supplementing the reports online at http://ikpodcasts.lecol-ck.ca.

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