

2019



POLAR BEARS
INTERNATIONAL

Annual Impact Report



© Kayla McCurry / Polar Bears International



Big, brilliant, and built for cold. Polar bears are our passion and our focus.

Your shared commitment to polar bears a healthy Arctic ecosystem means the world to us—and to the polar bear's future.

Together, we accomplished so much last year, and we're grateful for all you made possible. Following are some of our favorite highlights from the past year.

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Science Progress

Building Knowledge for a Changing Arctic

Our scientists continued to advance understanding of polar bear behavior, ecology, and the impacts of sea ice loss. Through field studies and international collaboration, we generated data that inform conservation policy and global climate discussions. Every discovery brings us closer to solutions that protect polar bears and the Arctic ecosystem they depend on.





SCIENCE PROGRESS

Your generosity supports research that helps inform policy.

For example, when the White House pushed to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil and gas development, our chief scientist, Dr. Steven C. Amstrup, was invited to testify before Congress about the risks posed to denning polar bear families, based on his decades of research.

The year ended with the good news that seismic testing leases would not be granted in the refuge that winter as originally planned. We continue to monitor the issue and share relevant research findings with the public, the media, and decision makers.

Update: on August 17, 2020, the White House bypassed the science and announced plans to greenlight oil and gas leases on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge. We're providing scientific/technical expertise to vigorously defend this key denning area and shield moms and cubs from harm.

WATCH DR. AMSTRUPS' TESTIMONY



"Let me be perfectly clear: Every maternal den matters."

- Dr. Steven C. Amstrup, Chief Scientist, Polar Bears International

Key Research

Science That Informs Action

From tracking studies to population assessments, our research provides a foundation for effective conservation decisions. In 2019, we shared findings through peer-reviewed journals and partnerships that help shape wildlife management across the Arctic. Your support fuels the science driving real-world change.

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KEY RESEARCH

Your gifts help fill critical knowledge gaps.

Because of the difficulties and expense of Arctic research, scientists lack data on many polar bear populations, with research on Russian bears especially deficient. Last year we participated in a study on Russia's Wrangel Island led by Dr. Eric Regehr of the University of Washington. The data gained will help address key conservation challenges for the Chukchi Sea polar bears. The team also laid the groundwork for future den studies in this important polar bear nursery.

In addition to the University of Washington, partners on this project include the Wrangel Island State Nature Reserve and the All-Russian Research Institute of Environment Protection. Special thanks to the High Point Community Foundation for major program support.

[READ MORE ABOUT OUR RESEARCH](#)

"Russia has long been a big blank spot in polar bear research, with little known about how populations are faring."

- Geoff York, Senior Director of Conservation, Polar Bears International



Outreach

Connecting Hearts and Minds

Through virtual learning events, educational toolkits, and global storytelling, we inspired people everywhere to learn about and advocate for polar bears. Our outreach bridges the gap between scientific discovery and public understanding. Together, we're creating a community of informed and passionate Arctic stewards.

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443k

Combined social
media following

230k

Youtube Views

765k

Website reach

1M+

Facebook Live reach

WATCH URSULA

Photos: © BJ KKirschhoffer / Polar Bears International

OUTREACH

You make our outreach possible, touching hearts and minds around the world.

At Polar Bears International, we have long believed that when people fall in love with polar bears and the Arctic, they'll be inspired to get involved with their conservation. This is why we're dedicated to connecting with people around the globe through photos, videos, and other outreach. In 2019, this included the launch of a moving film, "Ursula". Other outreach included our Polar Bear, Beluga, and Northern Lights Cams; engagement on social media; and blog posts and live broadcasts on our website.

Our partners on the cams include explore.org, [Frontiers North Adventures](https://frontiersnorthadventures.com), and [Parks Canada](https://parks.canada.ca).

"When you see wild polar bears and feel their plight, you'll want to do all that you can to save them."

Krista Wright, Executive Director, Polar Bears International



Tech Inspiration

Innovation for Conservation

Your support helps us explore cutting-edge research methods, like our “Burr on Fur” project with 3M. Together, we’re developing an adhesive that can securely and safely attach a small tracking device to a polar bear’s fur—even in extreme Arctic conditions. This minimally invasive technology will offer new insights into polar bear movement, health, and behavior in the wild

TECH INNOVATIONS

Your support allows us to explore cutting-edge research methods.

An example is our “Burr on Fur” project with 3M, the company famous for Post-It Notes and adhesives. 3M scientists are helping us find a better way to temporarily attach a small tracking device to a polar bear’s fur. The adhesive must be able to withstand sub-zero temperatures, snow, saltwater, and other challenges. If successful, the devices will provide a minimally invasive way to study movement patterns and other activities of polar bears in the wild, giving us insights into their needs, health, and status.

[LEARN MORE HERE](#)



“This project could provide a real breakthrough in how we study wild polar bears.”

*- BJ Kirschhoffer, Director of Field Operations,
Polar Bears International*

Tundra Connections

Bringing the Arctic to the World

Our live Tundra Connections webcasts connected classrooms and curious minds to scientists stationed in the field. Students and teachers experienced the wonder of polar bear country while learning about climate change and Arctic ecology in real time. These digital adventures inspire the next generation of conservation leaders.



TUNDRA CONNECTIONS

You make it possible for us to conduct live chats and webcasts from the field.

Our Tundra Connections ® webcasts link scientists and other experts with viewers around the world and allow them to ask questions. The broadcasts focus on polar bears, the Arctic, and climate solutions—helping to educate and inspire people, and motivate them to act on the climate crisis. While our broadcasts are typically held during the fall polar bear migration, we created a special series in the spring of 2020 to meet the needs of parents, teachers, and lifelong learners during the COVID-19 health crisis.

Our partners include explore.org, Discovery Education, and Connected North.



“Thank you for educating so many! Our students were excited to learn about polar bears and how they can help.”



2.9M

Views of all
education and
outreach content

175k

Educational webcast
views

WATCH OUR TUNDRA CONNECTIONS



Maternal Den Study

Protecting Mothers and Cubs

In collaboration with international partners, we continued our work to identify and safeguard polar bear denning areas. Using thermal imaging and satellite technology, we're mapping the hidden snow dens where mothers give birth and nurture their young. This critical research helps ensure a safe start for the next generation of polar bears.

"Working together on solutions for wildlife gives me hope."

- Dr. Megan Owen, Director of Population Sustainability, San Diego Zoo Global



MATERNAL DEN STUDY

Thanks to your support, we're able to conduct long-term studies that add to our understanding of the polar bear's biology and behavior.

For example, our Maternal Den Study in Svalbard, Norway, relies on solar-powered remote cameras that record the behavior and condition of polar bear moms and cubs from the time they emerge from their dens until they depart for the sea ice to hunt seals. The information gained during this sensitive period in the polar bear's life cycle will help set guidelines to protect polar bear families from disturbances as more human activities move north.

Our partners include the Norwegian Polar Institute and San Diego Zoo Global.

Polar Bears International House

A Home for Education and Collaboration

In collaboration with Norwegian partners, our researchers used advanced thermal imaging technology to locate hidden polar bear dens under the snow. This work helps identify areas needing protection and informs best practices for industry operating in polar bear habitat. Each discovery strengthens efforts to safeguard mothers and cubs during their most vulnerable time.



2,000
In person visitors

POLAR BEARS INTERNATIONAL HOUSE

Because of you, we're expanding our outreach in Churchill.

Last fall, we held the grand opening for Polar Bears International House, our new interpretive center in Churchill, Manitoba, the polar bear capital of the world. PBI House allows us to engage with visitors, sharing information on polar bears, sea ice loss from a warming climate, and how each of us can help. The building also provides staff housing, serves as a base of operations for our Churchill projects, and functions as a meeting place for locals and visitors.



"The warm reception from everyone involved has reminded me that we are not alone in our hope for immediate action on climate change."

-Dr. Thea Bechshoft, Staff Scientist, Polar Bears International

MARS House

A Home for Arctic Research and Conservation

The Mars Arctic Research & Conservation Centre in Churchill provides comfortable, energy-efficient housing for visiting researchers, volunteers, and staff. Just steps from the Polar Bears International House, it offers a space for collaboration and community in the heart of polar bear country. This remarkable gift—the largest in PBI's history—strengthens our long-term commitment to Arctic research and conservation.



"Thanks to this extraordinary gift from Adrienne and John Mars, researchers and staff now have a fully outfitted, dedicated base camp in Churchill."

- Richard Beck, Board of Directors, Polar Bears International



MARS HOUSE

Home is where you go after a hard day's work—a place that offers convenience, facilities, privacy, and comfort.

Not only did last year bring us Polar Bears International House, our new interpretive center in Churchill, it also saw the completion of the stylish and energy-efficient Mars Arctic Research & Conservation Centre, just a few steps down the street. Designed to house visiting researchers as well as volunteers and PBI staff, the Mars Centre provides a permanent building with living quarters and modern amenities—further demonstrating our commitment to research and conservation in the polar bear capital. We're extremely grateful for this donation, which represents the single largest gift PBI has ever received.





Human-Bear Coexistence

Living Safely, Sharing Space

Our coexistence programs help communities across the Arctic live safely alongside polar bears. Through partnerships, training, and early warning tools, we reduce conflict and protect both people and bears. Together, we're proving that harmony between humans and wildlife is possible.

HUMAN-BEAR COEXISTENCE

You're helping to reduce conflict between polar bears and people.

As the sea ice retreats in the Arctic, more polar bears are spending more time onshore in more places, leading to increased contact with people. Your support helps fund projects to keep polar bears and people safe. These include a study to test whether a compact surveillance radar system could detect a polar bear as it approaches a community, even in a snowstorm or at night. If successful, the system could help prevent deaths or injuries to polar bears and people across the Arctic.

Other conflict – reduction efforts include working with partners to share best practices for avoiding attacks. These range from improved safety messaging and preparedness, to eliminating food rewards and installing bear-resistant waste bins. Other measures include being prepared with deterrents such as bear spray, signal flares, or other noisemakers.

Our thanks to Utah's Hogle Zoo for partnering on the radar study.

*"Increasingly, polar bears and people are crossing paths across the Arctic.
Our goal is to keep both safe."*

- Geoff York, Senior Director of Conservation, Polar Bears International



WATCH MORE



A polar bear is swimming in a pool of clear, greenish water. The bear's head and one paw are visible above the surface. The paw is reaching towards a child's hand. Several children are visible in the foreground, looking at the bear. One child is wearing a pink hat and a dark jacket. Another child is wearing a blue jacket. The background shows a snowy landscape with trees and a building.

Arctic Ambassador Centers

Inspiring Action Through Education

Our network of Arctic Ambassador Centers connects accredited zoos and aquariums with PBI's mission to inspire conservation action. Through engaging exhibits and educational programming, these partners amplify awareness about climate change and polar bears. Their efforts help extend our reach from the tundra to communities worldwide.

"Being with like-minded people and forming relationships with other science communicators was a powerful experience."

- Shervin Hess, Wildlife Advocacy Program Manager, Oregon Zoo

ARCTIC AMBASSADOR CENTERS

Because of you, we're able to greatly scale up our climate impact.

Through our network of Arctic Ambassador Center zoos and aquariums, we share tested climate-action messaging, helping to build momentum for change and inspiring community involvement. This work includes holding in-depth Climate Alliance training sessions that provide zoo professionals with the tools they need to educate, motivate, and inspire the public. In 2019, we trained 19 participants, expanding our network to 320 graduates in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. Collectively, they reach millions of zoo visitors through their outreach and messaging.



Across
9
countries

320+
Total Climate
Communicators
Trained

50
Arctic Ambassador
Centers

[LEARN MORE](#)

Western Hudson Bay

Monitoring a Changing Ecosystem

Western Hudson Bay is one of the most studied polar bear populations on Earth—and one of the most at risk from climate change. Our long-term research there tracks how earlier sea ice melt affects the health and survival of polar bears. The insights gained help guide conservation strategies across the Arctic.



WESTERN HUDSON BAY

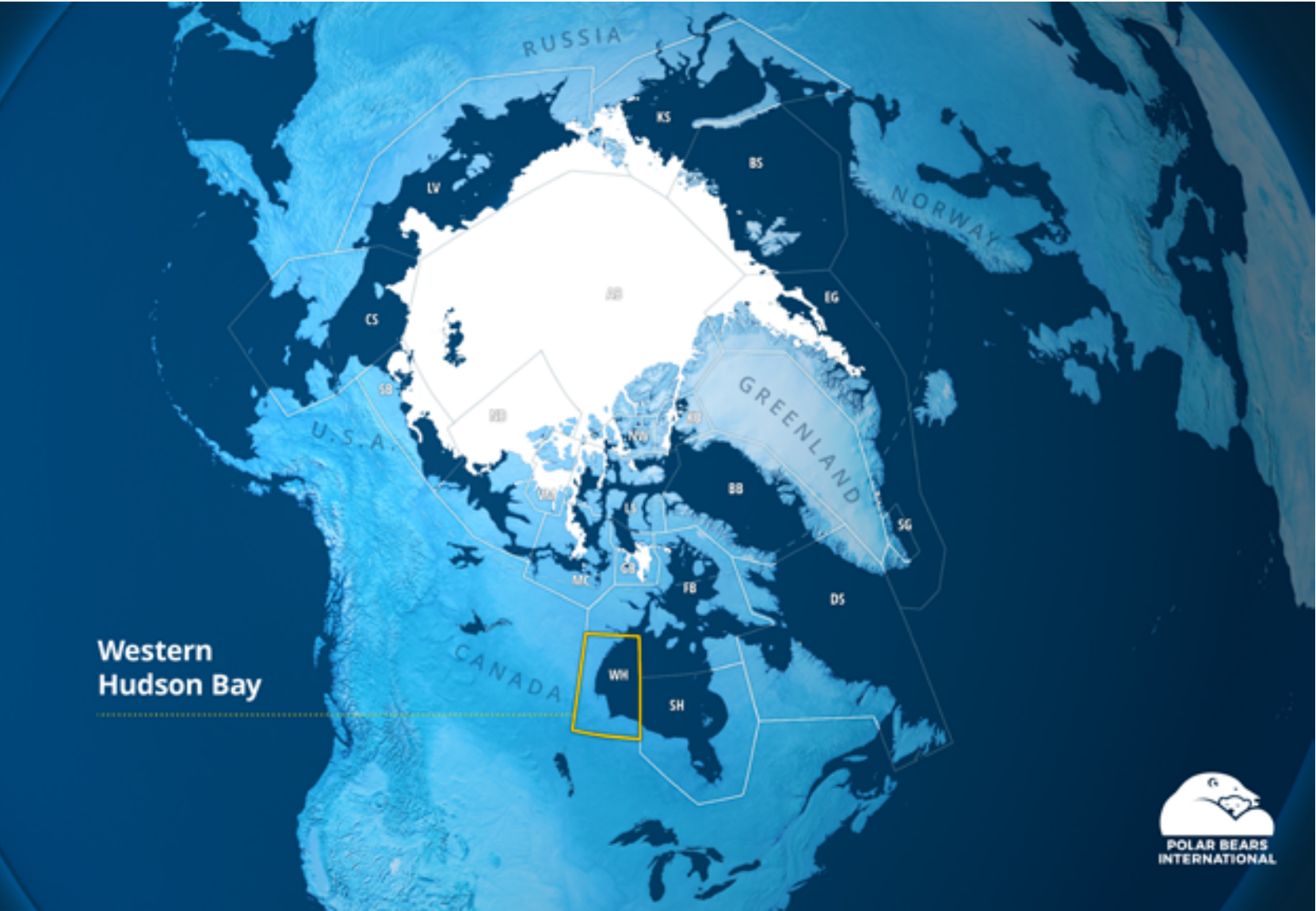
You allow us to support key projects in Western Hudson Bay, with insights gained helping polar bear conservation in other parts of the Arctic.

Churchill's polar bears are part of the Western Hudson Bay population, living in a seasonal ice area where the bay melts each summer and refreezes in late fall. Over the years, Polar Bears International has helped support a number of research projects in the area. Currently, these include an Ear Tag Study to learn whether polar bears detained in Churchill's holding facility go on to disturb communities to the north after their release; a Sea Ice Ecology Study to understand how the bears are responding to changing sea ice patterns; and long-term monitoring of the health and status of the Western Hudson Bay polar bear population.

The projects are led by researchers from the University of Alberta and Environment and Climate Change Canada.

"The Western Hudson Bay polar bears are the best-studied in the world, providing an invaluable long-term data set."

Dr. Andrew Derocher, Professor of Biological Sciences, University of Alberta



Testimonials

Voices of Hope and Action

Supporters, scientists, and community members shared how Polar Bears International has inspired their commitment to conservation. Their words reflect the power of collective effort and the ripple effect of education and empathy. Together, these voices create a chorus for change in a warming world.



“For people to have the opportunity to see polar bears for generations to come...that's my hope”

- Tricia Schers, Frontiers North Adventurers

“As long as we have the capacity to continue to work toward solutions for wildlife, I am hopeful.”
- Dr. Megan Owen, San Diego Zoo Global

“Young people are taking action, which is critical and it does give me hope”

- Richard Beck, Board Member

2019 Financials

A Look Into Our Work

Your generosity makes so much possible for polar bears, now and into the future. Every dollar you give is used thoughtfully and strategically to maximize impact for polar bears, people, and our planet.





REVENUE

Contributions – with donor restrictions: \$227,252

Contributions – unrestricted: \$2,040,903

In-Kind: \$488,917

Grants: \$243,928

Events – net of donor benefits: \$291,344

Bad Debt Loss: (\$2,223)

Total Revenue: \$3,290,121

EXPENSES

Programs: \$2,405,325

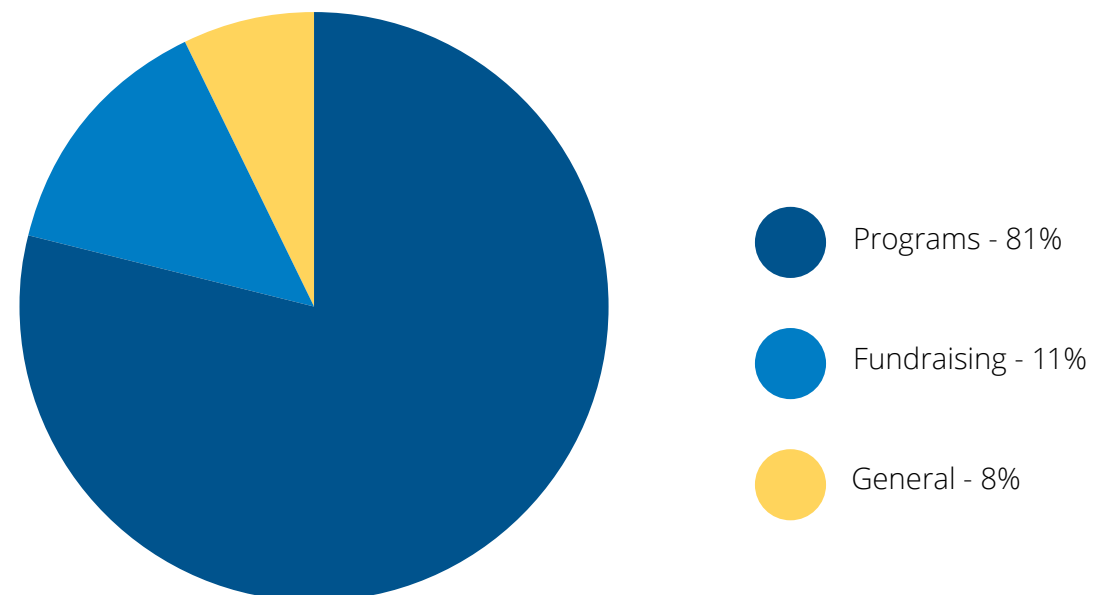
Management and General:
\$248,380

Fundraising: \$337,019

Total Expenses: \$2,990,724

Changes in net assets: \$395,540

Net assets at the end of the year: \$4,291,946



For any research projects that Polar Bears International helps fund, we do not pay overhead costs, a policy that ensures funds go directly to the projects and polar bear conservation.

2019 Board of Directors

Leading by Example

We could not do the work we do without those that guide Polar Bears International. Our Board of Directors help guide our strategic direction, work with management, and represent the best of us.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Kelleher- Chair

Amy Moore- Vice-Chair, Secretary

Steve Dolman- Treasurer

Richard Beck

Valerie Beck

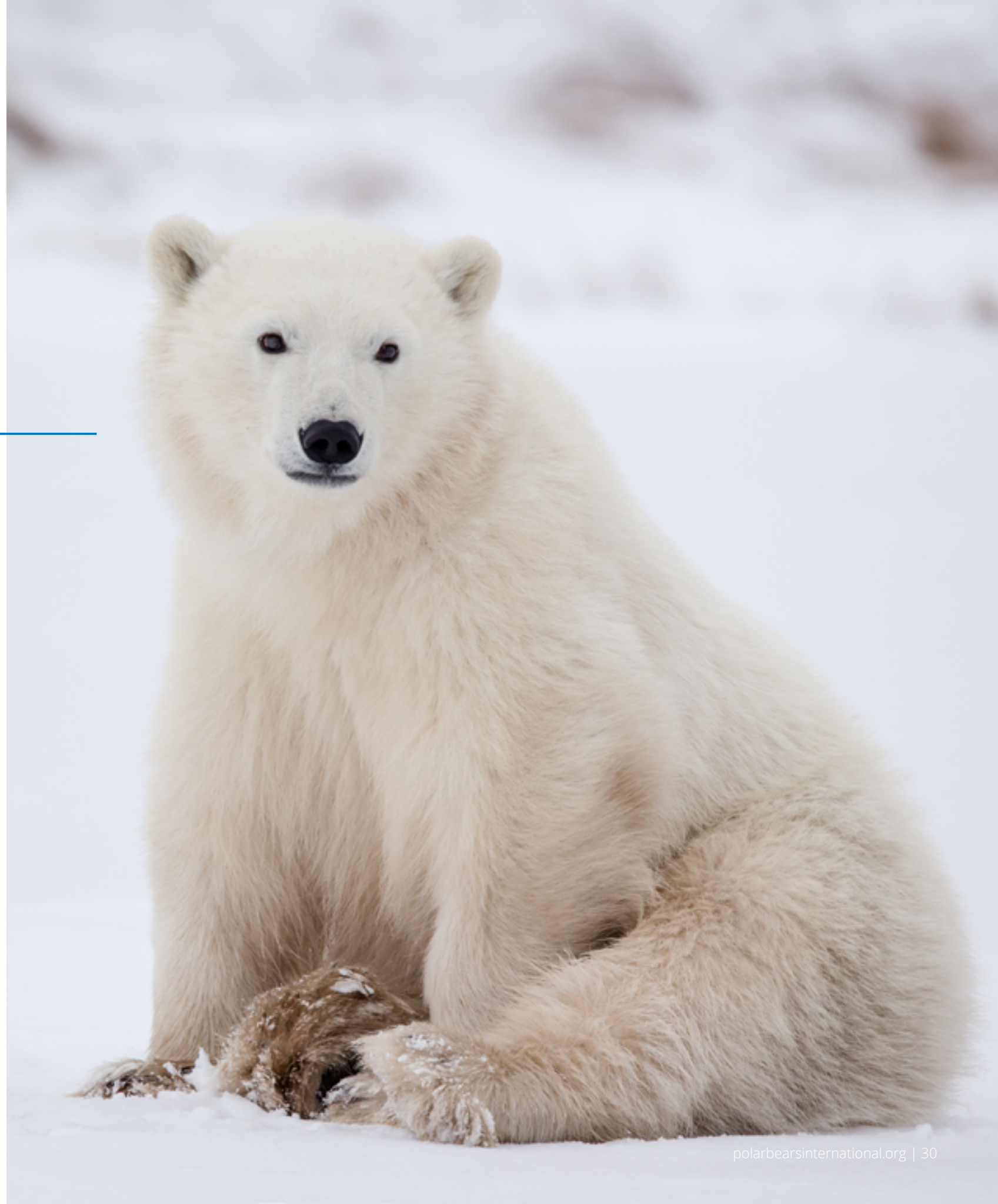
Kristin Biniek

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Sponsors & Donors

Making Our Work Possible

Recognizing champions for polar bears—honoring those who make our work possible. We are deeply grateful to all our donors, including our Polar Bear Patrons, Arctic Ambassador Centers, corporate sponsors, foundations, fundraisers, zoos, and partner organizations, who powered our work in 2019. Your generosity sustains a lasting impact for polar bears and the Arctic they call home.



PLATINUM

CANADA GOOSE® *CalmAir* 



SHARED
PLANET

SILVER

DAVID YURMAN

NORTHERN LIGHTS



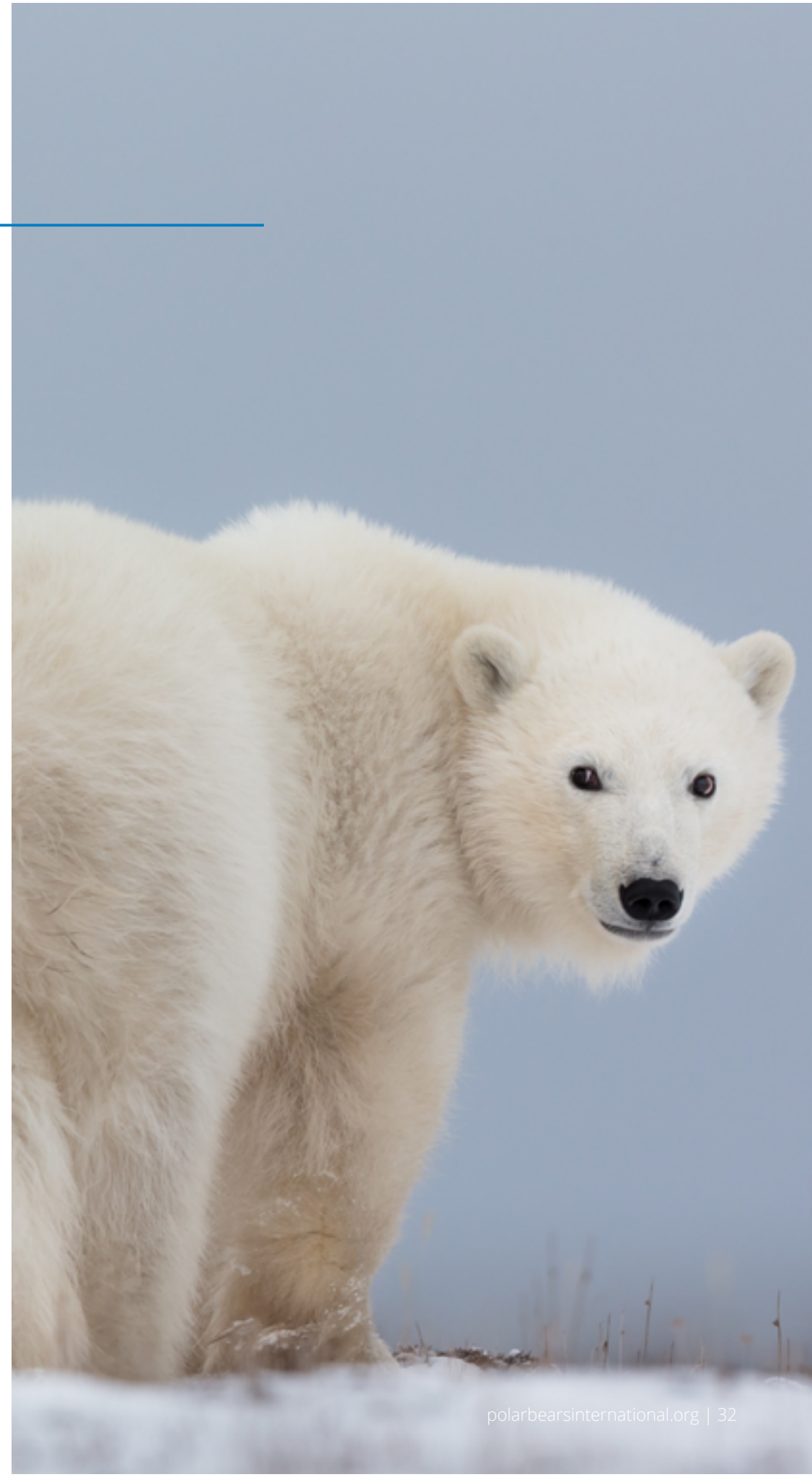
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explore.org
Frontiers North Adventures
Munich Zoo
Quark Expeditions
Shared Planet LLC
Tiergarten Schönbrunn – Zoo Vienna
Tierpark Berlin – Friedrichsfelde GmbH
Toledo Zoological Gardens
Zoologischer Garten Rostock

ARCTIC ALLIES

Cassier Jade
Nautisk
Preferred Freezer Services
Sleepbear



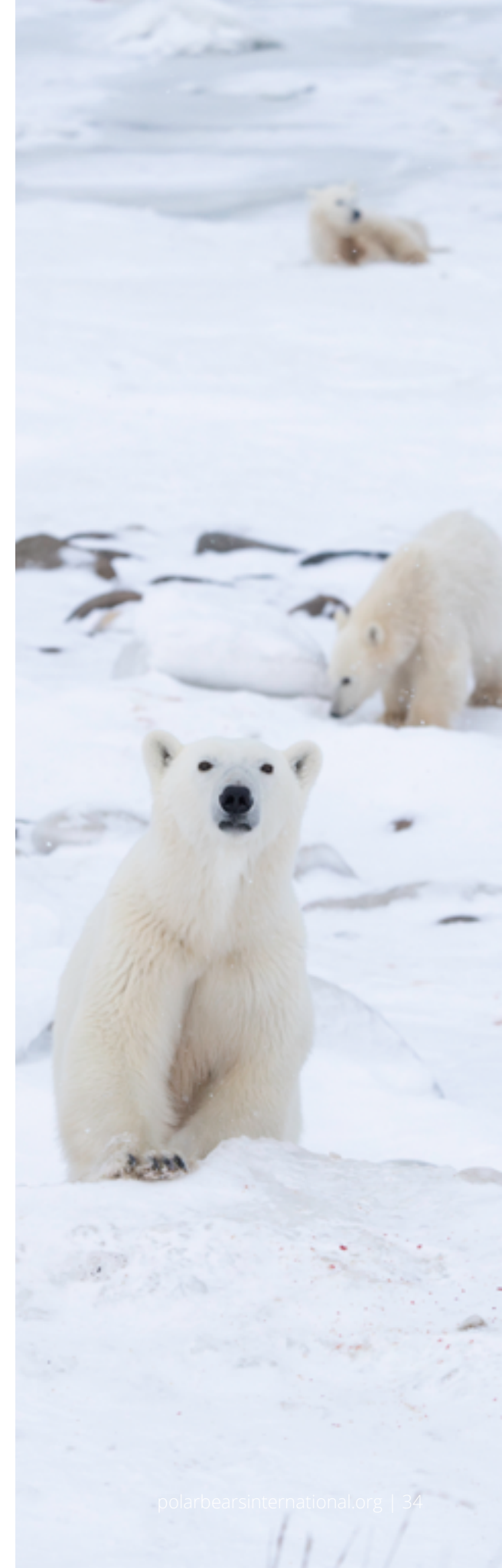
POLAR BEARS INTERNATIONAL HOUSE

Our heartfelt thanks to The Reiss Family Foundation for their generous lead gift to the Polar Bears International House.

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Joel Finlayson
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\$100,000+

Adrienne and John Mars

\$25,000 - \$99,999

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Utah's Hogle Zoo



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polarbearsinternational.org

Thank you for all that you do for polar bears.

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