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## EXPOSURE

# Death on the ice

**Is this dead polar bear a warning about the long-term impacts of climate change?**

Photographer **Louise Murray** and her Inuit guide Jonah stumbled across this dead polar bear in May of this year after a fruitless attempt to film belugas and narwhals in the Canadian High Arctic.

Jonah was delighted by the find. The corpse would have to be handed over to the authorities for an autopsy, but once this had been done, he would get to keep the skin – and that was worth a cool \$1,000.

The dead bear will have other uses besides being turned into a pair of boots or trousers. The autopsy will confirm the team's suspicion that he died of starvation. Jonah could tell by looking at his teeth that he was still a young bear and therefore didn't die of old age. There were no marks on his body – he simply hadn't been able to find enough to eat.

"He could have been an incompetent hunter," says Louise. "Perhaps he didn't quite crack it, didn't learn all the tricks from mum."

Or maybe, and more worryingly, he missed out on a crucial feeding period in the spring because the sea ice had already melted, depriving this youngster of the access to seal pups that should have fattened up his body for the leaner summer months ahead. WWF says most polar bears now "suffer decreased body condition" as a result of human-induced climate change.

A four-year study due to be published in November by the Arctic Council will warn that warming will occur in the Arctic at twice the rate of anywhere else in the world, dramatically impacting on species such as polar bears.

Ironically, however, Louise had been unable to see any belugas or narwhals because areas that should have been open water were frozen solid. So she's going back next year to try again.

Camera: Nikon D100; lens: 20-35 mm zoom;  
F14; speed: 1/125 sec

Louise Murray



