

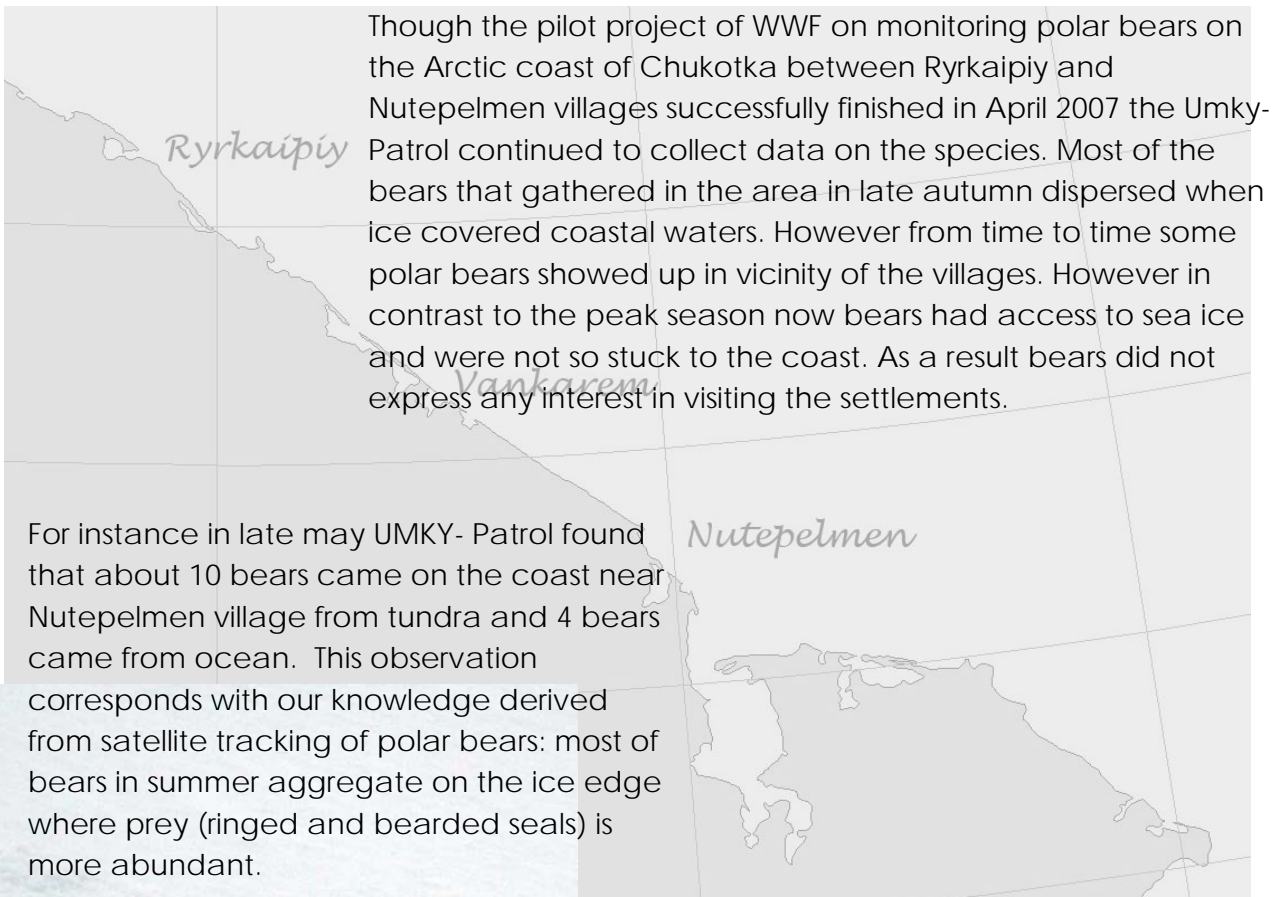


THE POLAR BEAR PATROL NEWS, # 2

July, 2007

“UMKY-Patrol” - living with bears

Umky means polar bear in Chukchian language, and “Umky-Patrol” is the name of WWF program “Polar Bear Patrol”.



Though the pilot project of WWF on monitoring polar bears on the Arctic coast of Chukotka between Ryrkaipiy and Nutepelmen villages successfully finished in April 2007 the Umky-Patrol continued to collect data on the species. Most of the bears that gathered in the area in late autumn dispersed when ice covered coastal waters. However from time to time some polar bears showed up in vicinity of the villages. However in contrast to the peak season now bears had access to sea ice and were not so stuck to the coast. As a result bears did not express any interest in visiting the settlements.

For instance in late may UMKY- Patrol found that about 10 bears came on the coast near Nutepelmen village from tundra and 4 bears came from ocean. This observation corresponds with our knowledge derived from satellite tracking of polar bears: most of bears in summer aggregate on the ice edge where prey (ringed and bearded seals) is more abundant.



Essential question – how this habitat use pattern will transform responding to ongoing climate changes. More coastal monitoring along with satellite telemetry is required to answer this vital question.

Photo: © WWF-Russia / Viktor Nikiforov

“UMKY-Patrol” expanded to Yakutia

Medvezhiy Ostrova (Bear Islands) – new cluster in the UMKY-Patrol network of polar bear monitoring. This small archipelago lies near Kolyma river estuary in Yakutia (subject of the Russian Federation next to Chukotka). With support of WWF regional nature reserve was established in these islands.



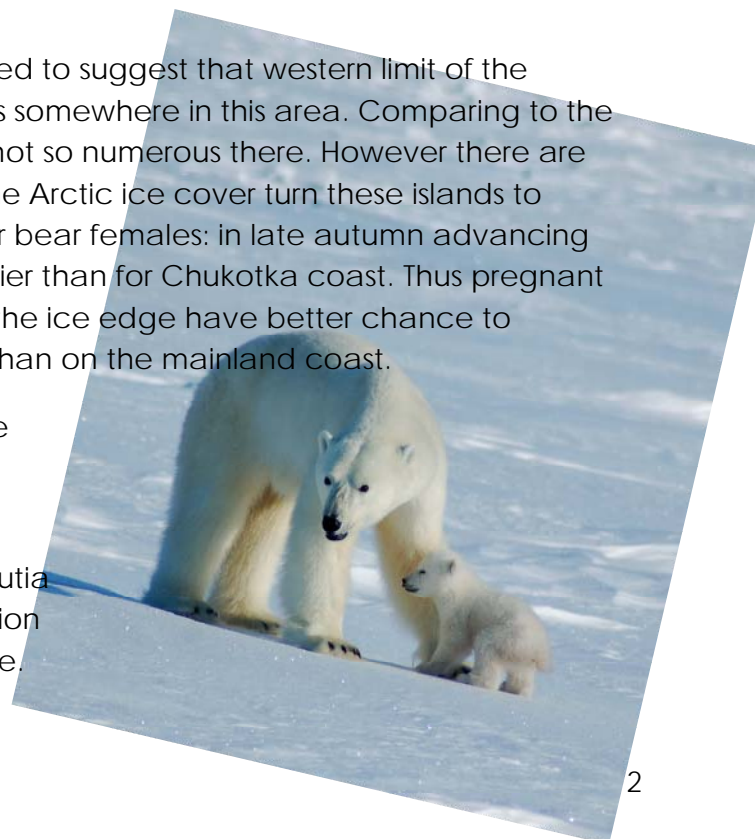
Photo: © WWF /Fedor Yakovlev

In 1990-s polar bear satellite tracking allowed to suggest that western limit of the Chukchi-Alaskan polar bear population lies somewhere in this area. Comparing to the nearby Chukotka coast polar bears were not so numerous there. However there are some indications that recent changes in the Arctic ice cover turn these islands to important denning area for pregnant polar bear females: in late autumn advancing pack ice reach for these islands much earlier than for Chukotka coast. Thus pregnant polar bear females that spent summer on the ice edge have better chance to construct maternity dens on these islands than on the mainland coast.

For instance in spring 2007 inspection of the islands revealed that over 10 polar bear females gave birth there.

WWF decided to support efforts of the Yakutia Ministry of Natura Conservation on protection and monitoring of polar bears in the reserve.

Photo: © WWF / Fedor Yakovlev



Inclusion of the islands into the UMKY-Patrol polar bear monitoring network will increase effectiveness of developing system for protection and study of the species in the Russian Arctic. WWF will provide the reserve staff with GPS, portable radios, night vision equipment, and monitoring methodology.

Polar bear hides rise in price on the black market

WWF-Russia has completed the third survey (since 2004) of internet-based supply of polar bear hides. Obtained results show that number of hides offered in 2007 is almost 3.5 times bigger than in 2003 and in 2005. It is also found that average price of a hide increased from \$2487 in 2003 to \$4487 in 2005 and to \$5250 in spring 2007.

Most of polar bears were illegally taken in the Russian northeast and first of all in Chukotka. Two "poaching areas" were detected in the vicinity of Dikson town (central Russian Arctic) and three – in Chukotka.

Analysis of obtained information allows suggesting that no less than 150 polar bears were killed in Russian Arctic in recent 15 months. Websites offering the polar bear hides are located in different regions of Russia and Ukraine.



Text: Andrei Boltunov and Viktor Nikiforov

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