

## Book Review

**POLAR BEARS: THE NATURAL HISTORY OF A THREATENED SPECIES.** Ian Stirling. Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., Markham, Ontario, Canada, 2011. ISBN 978-1-55455-155-2, 334 pp.

Ian Stirling's new book, *Polar Bears: The Natural History of a Threatened Species*, builds on his 1988 book, *Polar Bears*, by updating information and expanding its breadth. Stirling should consider this effort to be a personal best as it reflects his wealth of knowledge on and personal experience with the polar bear and the Arctic in general.

The first thing that captures your attention for this book is the breathtaking photography that richly illustrates this soft-cover publication. Not intended for the squeamish, the photos are of nature as it is—sometimes bloody, sometimes tragic, always amazing. However, it is the writing that captivates the reader. Stirling conveys information in a clear, yet concise style, making the scientific information accessible to the public. Best of all, he presents the information in such a way that the seasoned marine mammal biologist seeking details will also find it informative (the bibliography for each section of the book is of immense interest to the reader who wants to track down more information on the research reported). Stirling's ability to communicate science in an engaging manner to a wide audience—biologist and layperson alike—is something I have always admired and respected.

Stirling introduces the polar bear by setting the stage with information on the species' distribution and abundance, evolutionary origins, and interactions with humans. The book covers what is known about polar bear biology, including basic physiology, behavior, and demography. He then delves into how scientists study polar bears and, being interested in behavioral ecology, I was especially intrigued by the fascinating examples from specific projects. The book is peppered with interesting personal anecdotes, which are numerous, from a man who has devoted more than 40 years to the study of polar bears. I am always enamored with any scientific book in which the author so completely vests himself by incorporating personal accounts and observations from his life as a research naturalist along the way. The book concludes by detailing conservation issues, where Stirling raises issues regarding climate

change and its impacts on the Arctic ecosystem, and specifically on the polar bear. The grim future for this and other Arctic species is truly humbling. Stirling has clearly presented his personal opinions on the topic of climate change, careful not to present them as fact. He also clearly describes the opposing arguments and why he thinks they do not have merit.

Overall, this is an extremely engaging volume that is about, arguably, the best-known Arctic icon—the polar bear. This is a must-have addition to any library.

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