

Melting Arctic ice affecting walrus calves

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Scientists have reported an unprecedented number of unaccompanied and possibly abandoned walrus calves in the Arctic Ocean.

The experts believe global warming is causing sea ice to melt, forcing mothers to abandon their pups as the mothers follow the rapidly retreating ice edge northward.

Unable to forage for themselves, such calves are likely to drown or starve, the scientists said.

Lone walrus calves far from shore have not been described before, researchers report in the April issue of *Aquatic Mammals*. The sightings suggest increased polar warming may lead to decreases in the walrus population.

"If walruses and other ice-associated marine mammals cannot adapt to caring for their young in shallow waters without sea-ice available as a resting platform between dives to the sea floor, a significant population decline of this species could occur," the research team wrote. The lead author of the study was Lee Cooper, a biogeochemist at the University of Tennessee.

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