

Warming Arctic strands walrus calves

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Lone walrus calves facing starvation after separation from their mothers appear to be more common in the Arctic, scientists say.

In a report in the journal *Aquatic Mammals*, the scientists say they believe the calves were victims of thinning sea ice because of rising temperatures in the Arctic. One Coast Guard vessel observed nine lone calves during a two-month cruise north of Alaska in 2004.

Carin Ashjian, a biologist at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, said water flowing from the Bering Sea to the shallower continental shelf of the Chukchi Sea off northern Alaska was 6 degrees F warmer than it had been in 2002. She believes the result was thinner sea ice close to shore, with young walrus stranded or dumped into the water when pieces broke off.

"We were on a station for 24 hours, and the calves would be swimming around us crying," Ashjian told *The Washington Post* "We couldn't rescue them."

Young walrus spend the first two years of life with their mothers, remaining on an ice shelf while the adults dive for crabs and clams.

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