

Polar bears 'spotted swimming with cubs on back'

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A polar bear cub hitches a ride. © WWF / Angela Plumb

(PhysOrg.com) -- Polar bears have been spotted carrying their cubs on their backs while they swim through icy waters, according to an article in UK online newspaper the Telegraph.

According to the article, the practice is thought to be the result of the bears having to swim longer distances in the sea because of recent reductions in the arctic summer sea ice.

This claim supports research conducted by the Norwegian Polar Institute, which says that travelling on the mother's back could be vital for the survival of [polar bear](#) cubs during longer swims in waters surrounding scattered sea ice, which is prime seal-hunting territory for

the animals.

This mode of transport means the cub's body is in direct contact with the adult's fur and a large part of its body is raised up out of the icy water, thereby reducing heat loss.

This could be very beneficial for the young polar bears, who have not built up a sufficient layer of fat to stop them getting cold if they are swimming in the sea for a prolonged period of time.

Geoff York, WWF's polar bear coordinator, was quoted in the article: "As the arctic ice continues to melt, it is likely that polar bears are increasingly going to have to swim longer distances.

"Data from tagged bears near Alaska has indicated swims of 350-400 miles in the past four years and if polar bear cubs are forced to cover these distances, then it is vital for them to behave in a way that minimises heat loss.

"This reported behaviour, and anything else that helps [cub](#) survival in those circumstances, is good news."

More information: Telegraph: [www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/envi ... th-cubs-on-back.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/envi...th-cubs-on-back.html)

Provided by WWF

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