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Dead Polar Bear in Svalbard



The faded number "87" on the rump of this emaciated polar bear was put there by scientists when it was caught in April. (That way, if it was seen again, it would not be captured a second time.) At the time, the bear was fine, but sea ice losses likely took a toll. Photo copyright Ian Stirling. [Details...](#)

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Thursday, August 8, 2013 - 11:55

The tragic image of a dead, emaciated polar bear on an island in Svalbard is circulating widely in the media, a graphic reminder of the challenges polar bears face in areas with massive sea ice losses. Without a proper necropsy, it's impossible to know the precise cause of death, but the bear's painfully thin condition suggests death from starvation.

Scientists have long predicted that as the sea ice retreats, more and more polar bears will die from starvation. Polar bears are closely tied to the sea ice, relying on it to reach their seal prey.

Dr. Ian Stirling, a scientific advisor to PBI, was part of the expedition cruise group that discovered the bear's woefully thin carcass, which was little more than fur and bones. He reflects on the sighting—and the group's observation of healthier bears seen to the north on the pack ice—in our [Scientists and Explorers Blog](#).