

Arctic Winters Are Slowly Warming

It's wintertime in the Northern Hemisphere. That means many people around the world are experiencing the coldest temperatures of the year. But way up in the most northern parts of the Arctic, winter temperatures in recent years have been a degree or so warmer than normal. The rising temperatures have melted billions of tons of sea ice, which is causing problems for people and animals that live there and in other places around the world.



“In 2007, sea ice loss was the worst in history,” said one scientist. That’s bad news because Arctic sea ice reflects the sun [bounces back the sun’s rays], which protects Earth from getting too warm, she explained. But as the ice thins, more sunlight passes through it and warms the ocean. As ice melts, more land is exposed too. Land absorbs the sun’s heat, which causes water and air to warm up even more.

Melting ice can harm animals that need ice cover. Red foxes, for example, are moving north where they are taking the place of native Arctic foxes. Other animals that depend on sea ice -- including walrus, gulls, and narwhals -- are suffering too. And polar bears and some seal species that give birth in caves under the snow are losing newborn pups when warm temperatures cause their caves to collapse.

NEWS WORDS

level	reflects
degrees	native
collapse	depend

In many parts of the Arctic, the number of caribou is decreasing. That is changing the way of life for native people who used to hunt caribou for food and fur. On the other hand, reindeer populations are actually growing in some parts of the Arctic. With less snow and ice, there are more plants for them to eat.

Melting ice is not a problem *only* in the Arctic. It can cause problems in other parts of the world too. As ice melts, sea levels can slowly rise, inch by inch. If ice keeps melting, some places along the coast might end up under water in the years ahead.

Some people say that the warming of the Arctic is not a big problem. Throughout history, temperatures have risen and fallen, they say. But others think the way we live is causing temperatures to warm faster than normal. They say we need to make changes to the way we live.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

What can we do to change the way we live so that Earth’s temperatures don’t rise more than normal in the years ahead?