

Ice Bear - A Natural and Unnatural History of the Polar Bear by Kieran Mulvaney.
Hutchinson 2011.

The Polar Bear is not only the largest predatory carnivore in the world, a large male weighing in at up to 1750 pounds and standing thirteen feet tall on its back legs, it is one of the most loved animals and one of the most iconic species on the planet.

Ice Bear is a history of the *ursus maritimus*, and particularly its relationship with *homo sapiens*, a relationship which has cost lives on both sides, an insight into the life cycle of the bear, and an assessment of the bear's future taking into account the impact of climate change on its Arctic habitat and the ice on which it totally depends.

The word 'unnatural' in the title of the book suggests, among other things, that the author's approach will be unconventional, and in some ways this is also a travelogue, part based on the Greenpeace ship Arctic Sunrise as it plies its way through chilly northern waters, partly based in the polar bear Mecca of Hudson Bay in Manitoba.

Kieran Mulvaney is clearly enamoured of his subject, as well as in awe of it, and his style of writing draws the reader in to his enthusiasm and conveys the awe too; the penultimate chapter, Melt, details the discernible changes taking place in the Arctic and includes the theories of both climatologists and polar bear experts that these changes and the overall diminishing of the ice sheet may/will bring these glorious creatures to extinction.

The book begins and ends on the Arctic Sunrise, and at its conclusion, as the boat slips away from the Nares Strait towards the open sea the reader is left with a palpable and moving sense, not just of leaving the Arctic but leaving the bears to an uncertain future.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh