

# **Re-Assessment of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin Polar Bear Subpopulations**

## **Final Report to the Canada-Greenland Joint Commission on Polar Bear from the Scientific Working Group (SWG) of the Canada- Greenland Joint Commission on Polar Bear**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>.....</b>
<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Management History and Systems in Canada and Greenland related to BB and KB .....	1
1.2. Previous Delineations and Assessments of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin .....	3
Subpopulations .....	3
1.3. Canada-Greenland Joint Commission on Polar Bear and the Scientific Working Group .....	4
1.4. Subpopulation Re-Assessment .....	5
Pilot aerial surveys in Baffin Bay in 2009 and 2010 .....	7
Survey options review .....	8
Decision of the JC .....	9
1.5. A Multi-Year Research Plan for Baffin Bay and Kane Basin .....	9
Schedule .....	11
1.6. Process of BB and KB Assessment (2011-2016) and Delays .....	12
Program activities .....	12
Field activities .....	12
Analyses .....	14
Timeline of analyses and reporting .....	15
1.7. Literature Cited .....	17
Figure 1.1 .....	21
<b>Chapter 2 - Population Delineation of Baffin Bay and Kane Basin .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Key Findings .....	22
2.1. Subpopulation Delineation and Status Background .....	23
2.2. Methods .....	26
Genetics .....	26
Satellite Telemetry Studies of Movements and Range Use .....	27
Recaptures and Harvest Recoveries of Marked Bears .....	33
2.3. Results .....	36
Overall Study Area .....	36
Genetics .....	37
General Movements from Telemetry .....	38
Basis for Comparison of the 1990s and 2000s BB Satellite Telemetry Data .....	40
Subpopulation KDEs and Overlap of Ranges .....	40
Overlap of Ranges between Decades .....	41
Changes in Median Latitude from Telemetry .....	42
Movements across Subpopulation Boundaries from Telemetry .....	42
Recaptures and Recoveries during Genetic Mark-Recapture Studies, 2011-14 .....	44
Long-term Harvest Recoveries of BB and KB Marks .....	46
Movement of Bears between BB and DS .....	46
2.4. Discussion .....	47
Genetics .....	47

Movements and Telemetry .....	47
Changes in Polar Bear Densities in Melville Bay, Northwest Greenland .....	49
Recoveries from Marked Bears .....	50
Short-term Movements .....	50
Long-Term Harvest Recoveries .....	51
Sex and Age Class .....	52
Movement between Baffin Bay and Davis Strait .....	54
2.5. Literature Cited .....	56
Tables and Figures .....	62
<b>Chapter 3 - Reassessing the 1990s Baffin Bay Data for Bias and Compatibility with the 2010s Data .....</b>	<b>108</b>
Key Findings .....	108
3.1. Background .....	109
Distribution of Mark-Recapture Sampling on Baffin Island .....	111
Size of the Mark-Recapture Sampling Area on Baffin Island .....	117
Temporary Emigration Related to the Availability of Sea ice .....	118
Additional sampling considerations .....	122
Development of an Individual Covariate to Explain Inland Habitat Use .....	123
Challenges with Using the 1990s Radio Telemetry Data .....	124
Ramifications of Issues with the 1990s Baffin Bay Data .....	125
3.2. Literature Cited .....	129
Tables and Figures .....	132
<b>Chapter 4 - Habitat and Habitat Use in Baffin Bay .....</b>	<b>160</b>
Key Findings .....	160
4.1. Introduction .....	161
4.2. Methods .....	162
Sea-Ice Analysis .....	162
Sea-Ice Habitat Use and Resource Selection Models .....	163
Terrestrial Habitat Use and Selection .....	166
4.3. Results .....	173
Sea-Ice Habitat .....	173
Terrestrial Habitat Use and Selection .....	177
4.4. Discussion .....	183
4.5. Literature Cited .....	185
Tables and Figures .....	189
<b>Chapter 5 - Genetic Mark-Recapture Study of Polar Bears in Baffin Bay .....</b>	<b>228</b>
Key Findings .....	228
5.1. Introduction .....	229
5.2. Materials and Methods .....	232
Study Area .....	232
Mark-Recapture Sampling Design .....	233
Field Methods .....	238
Harvest recoveries .....	242

Genetic Analysis .....	242
Statistical Analysis .....	246
Geographic subsetting to evaluate the effects of different sampling methods in the 1990s and 2010s .....	259
5.3. Results .....	259
5.4. Discussion .....	262
5.5. Literature Cited .....	272
Tables and Figures .....	280

## **Chapter 6 - Reproductive Metrics for Mark-Recapture Sampled Polar Bears in Baffin**

<b>Bay .....</b>	<b>301</b>
Key Findings .....	301
6.1. Introduction .....	302
6.2. Materials and Methods .....	304
Study Area .....	304
Field Sampling .....	304
Reproductive Metrics .....	306
Sea-ice Metrics .....	307
6.3. Results .....	309
Litter Size .....	309
Recruitment .....	310
6.4. Discussion .....	311
Litter Size .....	312
Trends in COY Recruitment and Association with Sea-ice Conditions .....	313
Yearling Recruitment .....	315
Comparison with other Subpopulations .....	316
6.5. Literature Cited .....	316
Tables and Figures .....	321

## **Chapter 7 - Body Condition of Baffin Bay Polar Bears .....**

<b>Key Findings .....</b>	<b>331</b>
7.1. Background .....	331
7.2. Materials and Methods .....	335
Study Area .....	335
Field Sampling .....	336
Body Condition Scoring .....	338
Sea-ice Metric .....	339
Foraging Observations .....	340
7.3. Results .....	341
Body Condition Scores .....	341
Foraging During the Ice-Free period .....	344
7.4. Discussion .....	345
Body Condition of Baffin Bay Bears .....	345
Foraging During the Ice-Free period .....	352
7.5. Literature Cited .....	356
Tables and Figures .....	365



<b>Chapter 8 - Polar Bear Harvesting in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin: A Summary of Historical Harvest and Harvest Reporting, 1993 to 2014 .....</b>	<b>378</b>
Key Findings .....	378
8.1. Introduction .....	379
8.2. Methods .....	381
Canadian Harvest Data .....	382
Greenlandic Harvest Data .....	383
Pooling of Canadian and Greenlandic Harvest Data .....	387
Genetic Monitoring of Harvest .....	387
8.3. Results and Discussion .....	388
Canadian Harvest from BB and KB .....	388
Greenlandic Harvest from BB and KB .....	395
Combined Canadian and Greenlandic Harvest from BB and KB .....	406
Accuracy of Harvest Reporting as Assessed from Genetic Studies of Sex and Individual Identity .....	408
8.4. Literature Cited .....	412
Tables and Figures .....	417
<b>Chapter 9 - Habitat and Habitat Use in Kane Basin .....</b>	<b>443</b>
Key Findings .....	443
9.1. Introduction .....	443
9.2. Methods .....	445
Sea ice .....	446
Habitat Use Analyses .....	446
9.3. Results and Discussion .....	447
Sea-Ice habitat .....	447
9.4. Literature Cited .....	451
Tables and Figures .....	453
<b>Chapter 10 - Genetic Mark-Recapture Study of Polar Bears in Kane Basin .....</b>	<b>479</b>
Key Findings .....	479
10.1. Introduction .....	480
10.2. Materials and Methods .....	482
Study Area .....	482
Field Sampling .....	483
Harvest Recoveries .....	486
Genetic Analyses .....	487
Statistical Analyses .....	490
10.3. Results .....	495
10.4. Discussion .....	497
10.5. Literature Cited .....	504
Tables and Figures .....	508
<b>Chapter 11 - Aerial Survey of Polar Bears in Kane Basin .....</b>	<b>517</b>
Key Findings .....	517

11.1. Introduction .....	517
11.2. Materials and Methods .....	520
Study Area .....	520
Field Sampling .....	521
Statistical Analyses .....	523
11.3. Results .....	524
11.4. Discussion .....	525
11.5. Literature Cited .....	531
Tables and Figures .....	535
 <b>Chapter 12 - Reproductive Metrics for Mark-Recapture Sampled Polar Bears in Kane Basin .....</b>	<b>540</b>
Key Findings .....	540
12.1. Introduction .....	540
12.2. Materials and Methods .....	542
Study Area .....	542
Field Sampling .....	543
Reproductive Metrics .....	544
12.3. Results .....	545
12.4. Discussion .....	546
12.5. Literature Cited .....	547
Tables .....	551
 <b>Chapter 13 - Observations on the Body Condition and Foraging Habits of Polar Bears in Kane Basin during the Spring .....</b>	<b>553</b>
Key Findings .....	553
13.1. Introduction .....	553
13.2. Materials and Methods .....	556
Study Area .....	556
Field Sampling .....	557
Body Condition Scoring .....	558
Other Observations .....	560
13.3. Results .....	560
Body Condition Scores .....	560
Other Observations .....	561
13.4. Discussion .....	562
Body Condition .....	562
Feeding Observations .....	567
Seal Distribution .....	567
Skin Lesions .....	568
13.5. Literature Cited .....	569
Tables and Figures .....	576
 <b>Chapter 14 - General Discussion and Advice to the Joint Commission .....</b>	<b>583</b>
14.1. Conclusions .....	583
14.2. Lessons from Genetic Mark-Recapture .....	584

14.3. Recommendations on Sustainable Harvest .....	590
14.4. Recommendations on Monitoring Habitat Change on Polar Bears .....	593
14.5. Literature Cited .....	598
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>606</b>
Appendix A. List of Scientific Working Group members and external experts .....	606
Appendix B. The accuracy of estimating polar bear age-class and sex from helicopter-based, aerial observations .....	607
Appendix C. Regression results for an annual body condition metric for polar bears in Baffin Bay (BB). .....	623
Appendix D. Description of the polar bear harvest management and monitoring systems in Canada and Greenland. ....	625
Appendix E. Results of binary logistic regressions for body condition scores (poor, fair-good) for polar bears in Kane Basin. ....	636

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

We briefly present the history of the different polar bear management systems in Nunavut/Canada and Greenland to provide the background and context on the current assessment of the status of the polar bear subpopulations in Baffin Bay (BB) and Kane Basin (KB). We summarize the results of the previous assessment of the BB and KB subpopulations in the 1990s and the framework established in 2009 for the Canada-Greenland joint management of these shared subpopulations. We describe the process leading to the decisions on major objectives of a re-assessment and the subsequent development of a research plan for re-assessing the status of the polar bear subpopulations in Baffin and Kane Basin. Finally, we present the schedule of the completion of the study.

### **1.1. History of Polar Bear Management in Canada and Greenland related to Baffin Bay (BB) and Kane Basin (KB)**

Wildlife legislation in Canada did not address polar bear harvesting until 1935, when a hunting season from 1 October through 31 May was imposed. In 1949, hunting was restricted to native people. Arbitrary quotas for polar bears were introduced in Canada in 1967 that were based largely on the fur records from several preceding years (Lee and Taylor 1994, Prestrud and Stirling 1994).

Through a delegation of authority from the federal government, ultimate responsibility for the management of polar bears in Nunavut lies with the Government of Nunavut, as represented by the Minister of Environment (Lunn et al. 2010). However, this responsibility is

subject to the terms of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) that established a system of ‘co-management’ for wildlife. Under the NLCA, the Minister’s decision-making authority for wildlife management is shared with the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board and is subject to strict requirements for consultation with Regional Wildlife Organizations and community-based Hunters and Trappers Organizations. The intent of this co-management system is to ensure that decisions are based on the best available science and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit traditional knowledge), and that these decisions consider not only conservation as a founding principle but also take into account the values, beliefs, views and needs of Inuit. The system is also designed to ensure that Inuit are involved in all aspects of wildlife management including research, monitoring, and harvest management.

Polar bears occur in relatively discrete subpopulations and are managed as such in Canada. The annual polar bear harvest in Nunavut is within the estimated sustainable yield of females and controlled through a male-biased, sex-selective quota system (Taylor et al. 1987, 2008b). Females accompanied by cubs, cubs, and bears in or constructing dens are protected by law (Lunn et al. 2010). Currently, the quota year in Canada runs from 1 July through 30 June of the following year.

In Greenland, regulations for the catch of polar bears in the entire country were enforced beginning 1 January 1975 (prior to 1975 regulations in NE Greenland had existed since the 1937; Born 1995 and references therein). The regulations prior to the introduction of quotas in Greenland in 2006 to reduce hunting effort and protect females with cubs and also involved a closed season in July-August (ibid). Furthermore, hunting of polar bears was restricted to Greenlandic citizens who had hunting as their main occupation. Quotas for the Greenlanders’



catch of polar bears were introduced in 2005 and took effect 1 January 2006 (Lønstrup 2006).

The quota year in Greenland is between 1 January and 31 December.

The management history and harvest monitoring in Nunavut and Greenland are described in more detail in Chapter 8.

## **1.2. Previous Delineations and Assessments of the Baffin Bay (BB) and Kane Basin (KB)**

### **Subpopulations**

Delineation of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations (Figure 1.1) was largely based on movements of collared bears and the recapture or harvest of tagged animals and has been well documented (PBSG 1998, SWG 2010). The BB subpopulation is bounded by the North Water Polynya to the north, Greenland to the east and Baffin Island (Nunavut, Canada) to the west (Taylor et al. 2001). A relatively distinct southern boundary at Cape Dyer, Baffin Island, and the entrance to Kangerlussuaq/Søndre Strømfjord, Greenland, is evident from the movements of collared or tagged bears (Stirling *et al.* 1980, Taylor et al. 2001).

A study of microsatellite genetic variation based on biological samples collected during the first half of the 1990s revealed significant genetic variation between polar bears in BB and neighboring Davis Strait (DS) and Lancaster Sound (LS), but not between BB and KB (Paetkau et al. 1999).

The BB, KB and DS subpopulations are shared between Greenland and Canada (Taylor et al. 2001). Population inventories involving physical mark-recapture, in combination with satellite telemetry, were conducted jointly by Nunavut/Canada and Greenland during 1991-1997 with the objective to estimate the size of the BB and KB subpopulations. These resulted in an

estimate for BB of 2074 bears (95% CI: 1544-2604; Taylor et al. 2005, PBSG 2006) and for KB of 164 bears (95% CI: 94-234; PBSG 2006, Taylor et al. 2008).

Due to concerns with respect to the reported harvest occurring in BB, modelling was used to project how many bears there would be in 2004 based on the 1997 BB estimate and associated vital rates plus the reported annual catches in Nunavut and Greenland. The results suggested that BB would have experienced a decline to 1546 polar bears in 2004 (95% confidence interval: 690-2402; PBSG 2006). Although a similar modeling exercise was not done for KB, both subpopulations were thought to be declining as a result of overharvest (PBSG 2006, 2010, 2015).

### **1.3. Canada-Greenland Joint Commission (JC) on Polar Bear and the Scientific Working Group (SWG)**

The Canada-Greenland Joint Commission on Polar Bear (JC) was established with the signing of a “*Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Canada, the Government of Nunavut, and the Government of Greenland for the Conservation and Management of Polar Bear Populations*” (MOU) on 30 October 2009 (Anon. 2009). Primary objectives of the MOU are to: “(1) to manage polar bear within the Kane Basin and Baffin Bay management units in order to ensure their conservation and sustainable management into the future, and, (2) establish an effective system of management which will include adhering to the principles of conservation”.

The JC subsequently established a 5-member Scientific Working Group (SWG) to provide it with scientific advice and recommendations with respect to the conservation and management of the BB and KB polar bear subpopulations. Two of the SWG’s members shall represent Canadian and two Greenlandic research institutes/agencies, whereas the fifth member

is appointed by the SWG co-chairs from a research institute that is independent of both Canada and Greenland. To assist the SWG in providing the best scientific advice, external experts can be invited to participate in its work.

#### **1.4. Subpopulation Re-Assessment**

After an initial meeting in Ottawa, Canada in January 2010, the JC tasked the SWG with using the best available scientific information to:

- (1) Propose Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) levels for the Kane Basin and Baffin Bay subpopulations and provide the Joint Commission with a written report of its recommendations; and,
- (2) Provide science advice to the Joint Commission for monitoring the effects of habitat changes on polar bears.

The SWG provided a report to the JC at the 2nd meeting of the JC in Ilulissat, Greenland, in May 2010 (SWG 2010). The SWG noted that 100% of simulations using population viability analysis and current harvest levels showed that both the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations declined after 10 years (PBSG 2010). The SWG also noted that simulations to assess the estimated risk of subpopulation decline are typically run 10-15 years into the future from the point in time at which data were last collected to estimate abundance and vital rates. Furthermore, it was noted that there was uncertainty surrounding the magnitude of impacts of environmental change on polar bears and that demographic rates could have significantly changed since the last inventories of these subpopulations in the 1990s.

The SWG also noted that a common Canada-Greenland management goal for the BB and KB subpopulations had not yet been specified in detail. Accordingly, the SWG assumed that a

recommended TAH for BB and KB should ensure that each subpopulation remained at the accepted science-based estimate (PBSG 2010) until new scientific inventories had been conducted and management goals established.

Acknowledging the fact that considerable uncertainty existed about the status of the BB and KB subpopulations in 2010 and that clearly defined management goals had not been identified, the SWG estimated the sustainable TAH from the BB subpopulation to be 90 bears/year and to be 1-2 bears/year from the KB subpopulation (SWG 2010).

In order to address the second question posed by the JC, the SWG summarized items that should be monitored in BB and KB together with the possible monitoring approaches. A list of general scientific areas where monitoring is required, the rationale for the monitoring, and the potential methods that can help gather data under each topic were presented. Furthermore, the SWG indicated, where possible, how monitoring can be conducted by scientists and local users concomitantly.

Based on consideration of the key parameters that should be monitored in order to determine the effects of climate change on the BB and KB polar bear subpopulations and the need to ensure that harvesting of the two subpopulations is sustainable in a changing environment, the SWG recommended that the following research needs were given priority:

- (1) Subpopulation size
- (2) Distribution and movements
- (3) Physical condition of individual bears
- (4) Vital parameters (survival and reproduction)

The SWG also noted that other data useful for determining the effects of habitat change in polar bears should be collected routinely. Collection of these data involves the active

participation of users through the submission of information and samples from harvested polar bears. Sampling from the harvest will provide important information on age and sex structure of the harvest, body condition, reproduction, and levels of pollutants in polar bears.

However, given the age of the data on abundance and vital rates (PBSG 2010) combined with large-scale environmental changes in Baffin Bay during the last decades, the SWG **strongly recommended** that new estimates of subpopulation abundance, subpopulation delineation, and vital rates be given high priority (SWG 2010).

#### Pilot aerial surveys in Baffin Bay in 2009 and 2010

In 2009 (i.e., prior to establishment of the SWG), scientists from the Government of Nunavut Department of Environment (GNDE) and Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR) initiated a collaboration to determine the feasibility of using aerial surveys for estimating the size of polar bear subpopulations in BB and KB. A pilot survey was conducted in the Sirmilik National Park on NE Baffin Island in August 2009 to determine if the line-transect aerial survey technique could be used during the ice-free or open-water season in Baffin Bay. However, given the results from the rugged terrain and mountainous landscape, it was concluded that this method was not feasible (Stapleton 2010).

Based on the experience in 2009, scientists from Nunavut and Greenland decided to (1) conduct a pilot aerial survey over sea ice during spring in Baffin Bay, and (2) deploy satellite-transmitters on polar bears in Baffin Bay in order to collect data on distribution and movement necessary for evaluation of aerial survey data.

During 27 May-4 June 2010, a pilot survey was flown over the fast and pack ice in Baffin Bay off SE Baffin Island. The survey was determined to be a success and provided data that

demonstrated promise for the approach in BB. Based on the results of the 2010 spring pilot survey, a group of experts in polar bear ecology and population dynamics, population assessment methods and sea ice from the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, Government of Nunavut, University of Washington, University of Minnesota, and U.S. National Marine Mammal Laboratory evaluated the data and concluded that a springtime aerial survey would be a feasible approach for estimating abundance of polar bears in BB and KB and should result in estimates with adequate precision for management purposes (Laake 2010, Stapleton et al. 2010, SWG 2011).

### Survey options review

Following the advice from the SWG, the JC tasked the SWG to review and evaluate various methods for assessing the number of polar bears in BB and KB (JC 2010a). The JC further requested that the SWG's report include evaluation of benefits and limitations of using each of the proposed methods (aerial surveys, genetic mark-recapture, and physical mark recapture) and indicated that the review should be based on a pilot aerial survey conducted in Baffin Bay in Spring 2010 (see preceding section). The SWG was also tasked with providing recommendations for one or more scenarios that represented the best way forward and, for each scenario, to identify major attributes, risks and management questions including level of funding (JC 2010a). Subsequently the JC would make recommendations on the most appropriate survey methodologies for assessing the BB and KB subpopulations (JC 2010a).

In January 2011, the SWG submitted to the JC a review of options for conducting new research including recommendations on appropriate methodologies (SWG 2011), which considered the pros and cons of using physical mark-recapture, genetic mark-recapture, or aerial

surveys for subpopulation inventories in BB and KB. The general conclusion was that the physical MR method (1) is the most well established method available for estimating abundance of polar bears, (2) is the most widely accepted and recommended method by the greater scientific community, and (3) provides the maximum information needed for sound management advice on polar bears. In addition to an abundance estimate, it provides information that could be used to assess effects on bears of climate change and pollution.

The SWG concluded that the physical MR method was superior to aerial surveys and genetic MR because it yields the most detailed information and recommended that physical MR be used for estimating the abundance of polar bears in Baffin Bay. It was stated that aerial surveys and a multiple-year genetic MR may be considered as alternatives for assessing the number of polar bears in Baffin Bay. However, the SWG noted that there are disadvantages to both methods.

### Decision of the JC

In March 2011, the JC discussed survey methods for Kane Basin and Baffin Bay with Drs. Erik Born and Stephen Atkinson who represented the SWG. Following discussion of the SWG's report, the JC concluded that the genetic mark-recapture method was preferable based on lack of support by Inuit in Nunavut for physical mark-recapture, and on concerns that variability in sea-ice conditions have the potential to create an unacceptable amount of risk in obtaining accurate subpopulation estimates via aerial surveys. Thereafter, the JC recommended to the signatories of the MOU that a 3-year biopsy darting research program be developed.

## **1.5. A Multi-Year Research Plan for Baffin Bay and Kane Basin**

In March 2011, the JC requested the SWG prepare a research plan for the re-assessment of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin polar bear subpopulations. It was determined that preparation of such a plan was the responsibility of those members of the SWG who would serve as lead investigators on behalf of Nunavut and Greenland. Consequently, a multi-year research plan (Atkinson et al. 2011) for re-assessment of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations was developed by Drs. Stephen Atkinson (Nunavut), Erik Born and Kristin Laidre (Greenland Institute of Natural Resources).

The plan outlined a multi-year research program to be carried out collaboratively by scientists from Canada (Nunavut) and Greenland together with external collaborators (local people and scientists) participating in various parts of the study. The plan presented tentative schedules and budgets. The main goals of the research program were (1) to determine the size of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations of polar bears, and (2) evaluate how polar bears in these areas are affected by the decrease in sea ice.

The proposed research program had three basic field components: (1) Biopsying polar bears along E Baffin Island, in NW Greenland and in the Kane Basin region, (2) deployment of satellite transmitters on male and female polar bears in NW Greenland and Kane Basin, and (3) hunter collection of tissue samples from the catch of polar bears (harvest recoveries) in BB and KB (and adjacent subpopulations). A 3-year study was proposed beginning in the fall of 2011 with the purpose to:

- 1) Estimate the abundance and sex (and approximate age) composition of polar bears in BB and KB;
- 2) Compare a new estimate of abundance with those derived from previous studies (1991-1997) in-order to gain insight into subpopulations trend;



- 3) Delineate the boundaries of the BB and KB subpopulations and reassess the validity of these areas as a demographic unit;
- 4) Estimate survival and reproductive parameters (to the extent possible) in-order to facilitate population viability analyses; and,
- 5) Evaluate polar bear distribution with respect to environmental variables, particularly ice conditions, topography and food availability/distribution.

Results generated by the proposed research program have the following potential applications:

- 1) The development of an updated status report for BB including recommendations on sustainable harvest levels; and,
- 2) The development of models to assess the effects of changes in habitat (in particular sea ice) on bear distribution.

### Schedule

In BB, main field operations were conducted during spring and fall. Due to logistical constraints (remoteness of the survey area and consideration of light conditions in fall) field work was concentrated in spring in KB. The schedule of the proposed study was:

#### *Biopsying for genetic mark-recapture assessment*

- 1) Fall biopsying along eastern Baffin Island fall 2011, 2012 and 2013.
- 2) Fall biopsying in NW Greenland fall 2012 and 2013.
- 3) Spring biopsying in NW Greenland 2011, 2012 and 2013.
- 4) Spring biopsying in Kane Basin 2012, 2013, and 2014 (optional).

#### *Deployment of satellite radios*

1) Deployment during spring in NW Greenland 2011, 2012 and 2013 of satellite radios (satellite radios had also been deployed in these areas during spring 2009 and 2010).

2) Deployment of satellite radios during spring in Kane Basin 2012 and 2013.

*Hunter collection of tissues from the polar bear catch (harvest recoveries)*

1) Nunavut spring 2011 and onward.

2) Greenland spring 2012 and onward.

*Data analyses*

1) Genetic laboratory analyses, analyses of MR data, genetic data and satellite telemetry data 2012 and onward

*Final reporting*

1) September-October 2014

## **1.6. Process of BB and KB Assessment (2011-2016) and Delays**

### Program activities

Activities (field operations, laboratory analyses, data analyses, and reporting) in connection with the research program are summarized here. Details of the various activities are presented in the Materials and Methods sections of the various chapters of this report.

### Field activities

Personnel from several research institutions participated in planning and conducting the field work including GINR, GNDE, University of Oslo, and University of Minnesota. In addition, local polar bear hunters in Nunavut and Greenland participated on several flights aiming to obtain biopsy samples from unrestrained bears and/or immobilizing bears to furnish

them with satellite radios (NW Greenland and Kane Basin). In both Nunavut and Greenland, community consultations were conducted each year and information about the study was provided through meetings and via public media to local communities and the broader public audience.

The spring and fall biopsy program (2011-2013) along Baffin Island and in W and NW Greenland from the BB subpopulation was conducted as planned. From 2011 to 2013, 1,111 bears were biopsy darted along eastern Baffin Island (and genotyped) which was substantially more than anticipated. From 2009 to 2013, 143 bears were physically marked or biopsy darted (and genotyped) in W and NW Greenland. The spring biopsy program in Kane Basin was also successful although a third spring season was needed and completed during 2014. From 2012 to 2014, 129 bears were physically marked and genotyped or biopsy darted and genotyped in KB (Chapter 2 and 5).

Additional to the original research plan and concurrent with the biopsy sampling, a systematic aerial survey using sight-resight distance sampling protocols was conducted during spring 2014 to assess the number of polar bears in the Kane Basin subpopulation. Adding this extra component allowed for a comparison of estimates of subpopulation size via two different methods (i.e., genetic MR and aerial survey).

During 2011-2013 a total of 66 satellite radios (35 F, 31 M) were deployed in W and NW Greenland (in addition 35 satellite radios had been deployed there in 2009 and 2010; 20 F, 15 M). During 2012 and 2013 a total of 36 satellite radios (21 F, 15 M) were deployed in the Kane Basin region. Some individuals were recaptured during the study and furnished with new satellite radios. Hence, a total of 91 individual bears were tagged with satellite transmitters in BB and 34 individual bears in KB (Chapter 2). The satellite radios included small ear satellite tags

developed by GINR for tracking adult male polar bears and sub-adults of both sexes (Born et al. 2010, Laidre et al. 2012).

A total of 234 hunter recoveries (tissue samples) were obtained from the catch of polar bears in Nunavut and Greenland (1993-2013). The hunter recovery program was instituted in Greenland for the first time in 2012. In addition, 635 biopsies from physical MR operations to assess BB and KB subpopulations in the 1990s (*cf.* Taylor et al. 2005, 2008) were included in the recent MR assessment analyses (Chapter 2 and 5).

*In summary* – All field operations were conducted as planned and were very successful. The number of biopsies obtained from the BB subpopulation was substantially higher than expected. All handling in NW Greenland and Kane Basin of individual polar bears in connection with deployment of satellite radios were made without any complications. The general public and local communities were informed about the operations and local polar bear hunters participated on several of the flights to obtain biopsies or immobilize polar bears.

### Analyses

Wildlife Genetics International (Nelson, British Columbia, Canada) analyzed all genetic samples (9 nuclear markers).

Satellite telemetry data (habitat analyses) were analyzed under leadership of the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources and Dr. Kristin Laidre.

Analyses of ice metrics were conducted by Dr. Harry Stern at the Polar Science Center (University of Washington, USA) in collaboration with Laidre.

Analyses of the genetic MR recapture data were conducted at Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology (University of Minnesota) under the leadership of

postdoctoral research associate Dr. Seth Stapleton, and his supervisor, Professor Todd Arnold. Salary for Dr. Stapleton's postdoctoral fellowship was provided by the Government of Nunavut, Environment Canada, and GINR. Close cooperation on MR analyses was conducted with outside expert Dr. Eric V. Regehr (US Fish and Wildlife Service).

Analyses of field observations of polar bear body condition were made by Nunavut under leadership of Dr. Stephen Atkinson.

Population genetic analyses to determine the demographic identities of Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulation were made by Dr. Liselotte Wesley Andersen at Department of Bioscience (University of Århus, Denmark) based on the results of analyses of nine nuclear markers used in the genetic MR study.

All SWG members participated in various phases of analyses. External experts (Appendix A) also participated in the analyses and in three face-to-face progress meetings of the SWG held at the Polar Science Center, University of Washington.

### Timeline of analyses and reporting

The SWG originally proposed an October 2014 deadline for submission of a final report to the JC (SWG 2011). However, due to the time required for completion of sample processing in the genetic laboratory this deadline could not be met. The delay was a consequence of the largely successful field work, which exceeded expectations in terms of the quality and number of biopsy samples. As the mark-recapture modeling could not begin until the laboratory analyses were completed and the final datasets compiled, a new deadline for a final report of 30 April 2015 was proposed by the SWG (SWG 2014). However, further unanticipated delays occurred related to availability of historical samples and a final comprehensive dataset was not available

until mid-December 2015. This delay put the analyses approximately 6 months behind schedule (SWG letter to JC).

In October 2015, the SWG held a 2<sup>nd</sup> face-to-face meeting in Seattle, Washington. At the meeting, preliminary results from analyses on abundance and vital rates, population genetic structure, range use, distribution, seasonal movements, and trends in sea-ice habitat were presented and evaluated. Near-final results of the analyses of range use, distribution, seasonal movements, and trends in sea-ice habitat and genetic analyses were also presented. However, the presentation of preliminary results from the mark-recapture modeling revealed that a considerable amount of additional work was still required from collaborators at University of Minnesota (SWG 2015). This work included, among other things, more in-depth error checking and a more detailed exploration of data from the MR studies in the 1990s in order to assess bias and potentially detect trends in abundance. This required revising the basic structure of the population models, developing and running model simulations, and validating the final model results before a final report could be completed.

Following this meeting the SWG and collaborators held 13 teleconferences between November 2015 and April 2016 where progress in the MR modeling of abundance in BB and KB was discussed and evaluated. A third face-to-face meeting was held in February 2016 to evaluate the revised modeling results.

After detailed discussions of the results of the MR assessment of the BB and KB subpopulations the SWG identified items for further analyses by University of Minnesota before final results could be sent to external scientific review (SWG 2016). In May 2016, results of the mark-recapture assessments were sent to Dr. Gary White (Professor Emeritus, Colorado State University) for a courtesy, external peer-review. Dr. White is a world-expert in mark-recapture

population analyses. Dr. White gave the analyses a positive review and approved the analytical methods used and their results.

In summary the analyses of sea ice, movement and habitat use were conducted according to the original time plan. However, unanticipated delays in getting a final genetic dataset and complications related to the modeling of the genetic data resulted in delays in preparing the final report to the JC.

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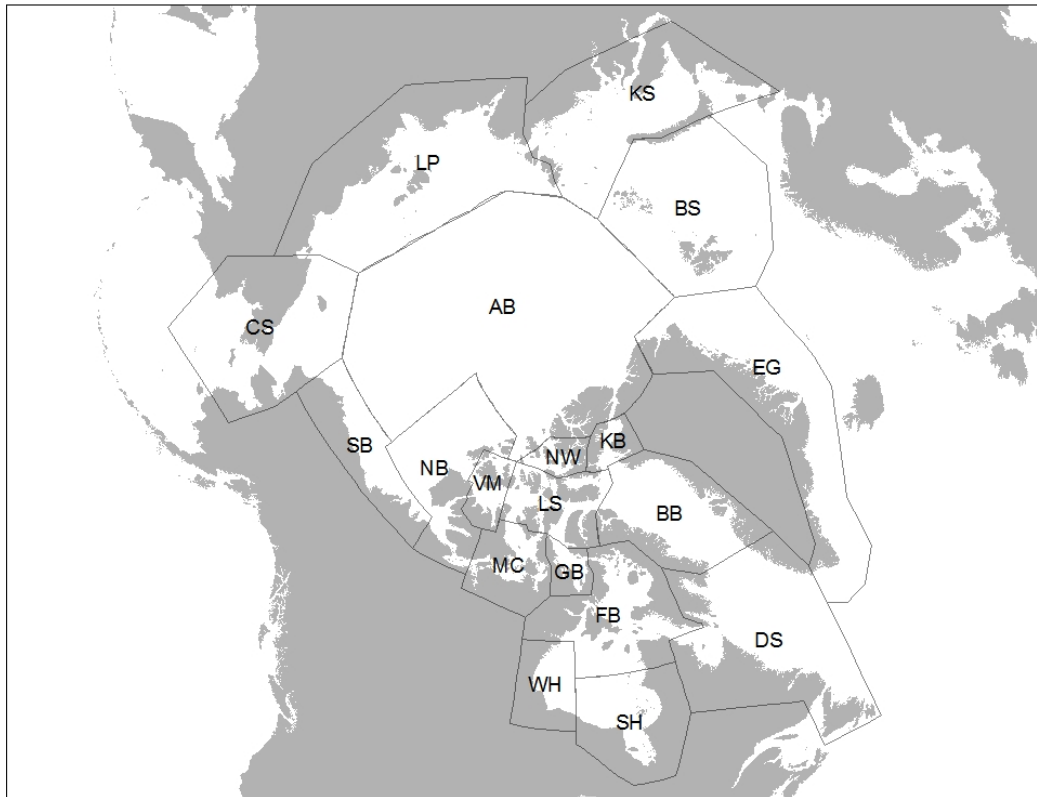
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**Figure 1.1.** Map of the circumpolar Arctic showing the 19 subpopulations of polar bears, including Baffin Bay (BB) and Kane Basin (KB). Polar Bear subpopulations: Arctic Basin (AB), Baffin Bay, Barents Sea (BS), Chukchi Sea (CS), Davis Strait (DS), East Greenland (EG), Foxe Basin (FB), Gulf of Boothia (GB), Kane Basin, Kara Sea (KS), Lancaster Sound (LS), Laptev Sea, M'Clintock Channel (MC), Northern Beaufort Sea (NB), Norwegian Bay (NW), Southern Beaufort Sea (SB), Southern Hudson Bay (SB), Viscount Melville Sound (VM), and Western Hudson Bay (WH).

## CHAPTER 2

# SUBPOPULATION DELINEATION OF BAFFIN BAY AND KANE BASIN

### KEY FINDINGS

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#### Baffin Bay (BB)

- The 1990s and 2000s satellite telemetry data are comparable for analysis; approximately 92% of adult females collared in West Greenland in spring during the 2000s use the same area on Baffin Island where adult females were captured and collared in fall in the 1990s.
- There was a significant reduction in the size of the 2000s BB 95% bivariate normal kernel range (i.e. a measure of the area used by collared bears) in all months and seasons when compared to the range in the 1990s. The most marked reduction was a 60% decline in subpopulation range size summer.
- The overlap of the 1990s and 2000s BB ranges was < 50% in all months, reflecting both a contraction and shift of the BB subpopulation range in the 2000s. These shifts are related to the loss of annual sea ice and changes in breakup timing, contracting the range of the BB subpopulation and shifting the distribution of BB polar bears northward in all seasons. The BB subpopulation is still distributed within the current management boundaries.
- There were significant shifts north in the median subpopulation latitude in all seasons in BB across decades.
- Bears in the 2000s were significantly less likely to leave BB than in the 1990s ( $p < 0.001$ ), with reductions in the number of bears moving into Davis Strait and Lancaster Sound.
- Genetic analyses using eight polymorphic microsatellites in recent samples (2009-2014) had low genetic resolution. BB and KB polar bears could not be differentiated genetically. Also in accordance with previous genetic studies, BB-KB polar bears were found to be genetically different from polar bears in Lancaster Sound and Davis Strait.
- During the genetic mark-recapture studies in BB and KB (2011-2014) there were very low levels of recapture or harvest recovery of bears outside their subpopulation of origin.
- Satellite telemetry demonstrates that emigration from BB has been significantly reduced since the 1990s, largely due to reduced sea-ice extent in winter and absence of sea ice in summer. This suggests the BB subpopulation has become more discrete, with less exchange between it and other subpopulations.

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#### Kane Basin (KB)

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- KB mean 95% kernel ranges have generally expanded since the 1990s. The increase in range use in the 2000s occurs in all seasons, however is statistically significant only in summer (June-September), where ranges doubled between the 1990s and the 2000s. This range expansion is likely related to changes in sea ice, as KB is trending towards the characteristics of an annual ice ecoregion (like BB) where ice melts out almost completely each summer.
  - There is still considerable seasonal overlap in KB subpopulation ranges for bears in the 1990s and 2000s (50-98% overlap over decades), suggesting that bears generally continue to use the same areas of KB.
  - There were significant northward shifts in KB median latitude of polar bear locations in the 2000s in spring and summer, although these shifts were smaller than observed in BB. Variability in the range of latitudes has increased; bears in the 2000s use a broader range of latitudes. There has been no change during winter.
  - These distribution patterns did not change with a sensitivity analysis in which bears captured in eastern KB were excluded from the 2000s data, to match the distribution of captures in the 1990s. This suggests that our key findings for KB were not influenced by the distribution of capture locations.

### • **BB and KB**

Overall, our findings based on satellite telemetry, movement of marked bears and genetics suggest that the existing boundaries of the BB and KB subpopulations continue to be relevant for harvest management purposes and population monitoring.

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## **2.1. Subpopulation Delineation and Status Background**

Cluster analyses of movement data from satellite-collared bears (Taylor et al. 2001), genetic analyses (e.g., Paetkau et al. 1999), and recaptures and harvest recoveries of marked (tagged) bears (Taylor and Lee 1995, Taylor et al. 2001) are among the methods that have been used to evaluate and delineate the boundaries of the Baffin Bay (BB) and Kane Basin (KB) subpopulations. For BB, genetic analyses suggest a lack of genetic differentiation of BB from the adjacent KB subpopulation to the north, but a significant genetic difference from polar bears in the Davis Strait (DS) subpopulation (Paetkau et al. 1999). Analyses of satellite collar data and tag returns suggest that some interchange occurs among BB and adjacent subpopulations

including DS, Lancaster Sound (LS) and KB (e.g., Taylor et al. 2001). However, for the purposes of management, BB is considered a distinct demographic unit, and its dynamics are largely driven by intrinsic rates of reproduction and mortality rather than exchange with neighboring subpopulations.

For KB, analyses of satellite collar data and tag returns suggest partial closure. However, the discreteness of this subpopulation from neighbouring units has been questioned, in part due to the lack of genetic differentiation from surrounding subpopulations and the potential for immigration from these much larger subpopulations to significantly influence demographic processes in a source-sink dynamic (Taylor et al. 2008). Particularly notable interchange occurs with BB and LS. The North Water polynya, a large area of open water in northern Baffin Bay and southern Smith Sound, is a significant regional geographic feature that exhibits substantial intra- and inter-annual variability in spatial extent and is thought to form a barrier between KB and BB – LS.

Sea ice in BB and KB has decreased markedly during the last 3 decades (Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Peacock et al. 2012, Laidre et al. 2015, Chapter 4 and 9), with earlier spring break up and later fall formation. The extent to which these trends in sea ice will affect the distribution and boundaries of these subpopulations remains uncertain and requires updated information. In particular, there is a need to re-evaluate these boundaries when undertaking studies to estimate abundance and vital rates to ensure sampling remains consistent with the distribution of the biological subpopulations.

The delineation and status of the BB subpopulation has been documented and updated by the IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, and <http://pbsg.npolar.no/en/index.html>) and annually by the Canadian Polar Bear Technical

Committee (unpublished). Based on the movements of adult females with satellite radio-collars and the recapture or harvest of tagged animals, the BB subpopulation of polar bears is bounded by the North Water Polynya to the north, Greenland to the east and Baffin Island, Nunavut, Canada to the west (Taylor et al. 2001) (Figure 1.1). A relatively distinct southern boundary at Cape Dyer, Baffin Island, and the entrance to Kangerlussuaq/ Søndre Strømfjord, Greenland, is evident from the movements of tagged bears (Stirling et al. 1980) and from adult female polar bears monitored by satellite telemetry (Taylor et al. 2001).

Analysis using microsatellites revealed significant genetic variation between polar bears in BB and neighboring DS, but not between polar bears in BB and neighboring KB (Paetkau et al. 1999). However, bears from BB-KB differed genetically from polar bears in the neighboring LS and DS subpopulations (Paetkau et al. 1999, Peacock et al. 2015, Malenfant et al. 2016). The original separation of the polar bears subpopulations into the two management units Kane Basin and Baffin Bay was based on studies of movement of polar bears with satellite collars in the 1990s and the fact that the North Water Polynya in northern Baffin Bay, to a certain extent, acts as a barrier to movement between BB and KB (PBSG 1998, Taylor et al. 2001). The samples included in the genetic study by Paetkau et al. (1999) were collected in the early 1990s. A study by Peacock et al. (2015) was based on more recent samples (i.e., BB: mainly 2006-2008; DS: 2005-2007; LS: mainly 2008), however the samples from KB were from the 1990s. Malenfant et al. (2016) conducted a re-analysis and relied upon subsets of the same data in Peacock et al. (2015). Hence, the KB-samples in Malenfant et al. (2016) were also not temporally congruent with samples from BB, LS and DS.

Based on the movements of KB adult females with satellite collars and the recapture or harvest of tagged animals, the boundaries of the KB subpopulation include the North Water

Polynya (to the south of KB), and Greenland and Ellesmere Island to the west, north, and east and the southern part of Kennedy Channel to the north (Taylor et al. 2001; Figure 1.1).

There have been no new scientific studies in BB or KB to update information on subpopulation delineation since 1997. We used new data from genetics, satellite telemetry and information on the movements of bears amongst BB, KB and surrounding subpopulations as detected by the recapture or harvest of marked individuals to assess the current BB boundaries. Our objective was to use these data to support other lines of evidence relating to the delineation of these subpopulations.

## **2.2. Methods**

### Genetics

In this study, a large recent sample of polar bear tissues was obtained from the subsistence catch and from scientific biopsies in BB, KB, LS and DS (2009-2014). This was obtained primarily for the genetic mark-recapture as reported in Chapters 5 and 10. Data from these analyses were therefore available for an updated examination of population genetics in BB and KB. The majority of the samples were collected between 2011 and 2014. Hence, in contrast to previous studies, the samples collected in connection with the genetic mark-recapture study were both more recent and also temporally congruent (Table 2.1).

The genetic analyses reported here used the same eight polymorphic microsatellite markers as in MR analyses to explore to what extent polar bears in KB, BB, LS and DS differed genetically (e.g., PBSG 2010). The decision to make these analyses was made *post hoc* and genetic analyses were not a part of the original study plan (see Chapter 1). Hence, these analyses were based on a platform of opportunity (i.e., the samples had been analyzed genetically and the



data were available), fully recognizing that more nuclear markers would result in a higher resolution.

Genetic data from a total of 1,364 individual polar bears from the BB, KB, LS and DS subpopulations were available for the genetic analyses. A subset of 402 polar bears sampled during the winter-spring season (Nov-June) in 2012-2014 represented all four subpopulations under consideration. This subset consisted of the spring biopsy samples from Kane Basin, and winter-spring harvest samples from BB, LS and DS. We considered the samples to have been collected within a narrow time frame (i.e., “temporally congruent”) that would exclude major displacement of groups of polar bears among BB, KB, LS and DS during the sampling period (Table 2.1).

The population genetic analyses were conducted by Department of Bioscience (Aarhus University, Denmark) using standardized analytical tools and methods (ADEGENET package, Jombart 2008; ARLEQUIN Version 3.5.1, Excoffier and Lischer 2010; BA3-3.0.3, Wilson and Rannala 2003; DAPC, Jombart et al. 2010; FSTAT, Goudet 1995; GENECLASS2, Piry et al. 2004; GENELAND, Guillot et al. 2005, Guillot 2008; STRUCTURE, Prichard et al. 2000).

### Satellite Telemetry Studies of Movements and Range Use

Polar bears were tagged in NW Greenland on the fast and pack ice between mid-March and mid-April 2009-2013 in Baffin Bay and mid-April to early May 2012-2013 in Kane Basin. Field operations were based out of coastal settlements in West Greenland or research stations on Ellesmere Island. Searches for bears in BB occurred out to a maximum distance of 150 km from the coast. Areas with consolidated glacier ice at the glacial terminus were also searched in both BB and KB. A total of 91 individual bears were tagged with satellite transmitters in BB and 34

individual bears in KB. Of these, 38 were AFs collared in BB and 20 collared AFs in KB (Table 2.2, Figures 2.1 and 2.2). In the 2000s, both sexes and subadults were tagged. These data were combined with a historical data set of captured and tracked from both areas in the 1990s. In BB, 1991-1995 43 collars were deployed on AFs, with the majority deployed during the ice free season in fall on Baffin Island (n=11 deployed in spring in NWG, 9 of which transmitted for sufficient time to be included in the analyses) (Table 2.3). In KB, 1992-1994, 12 collars were deployed on AFs on the west side of KB in the fjords and fast ice. Only bears captured within the BB or KB subpopulation boundaries as defined by PBSG (2010) were included in the comparative analysis.

Polar bears at all sites were darted and immobilized from an Ecureuil AS350 (BB) or Bell 206 LR (KB) helicopter and handled according to procedures described in Stirling et al. (1989). Standard body measurements (standard length and axillary girth) were taken and total body mass was estimated using the approach of Derocher and Wiig (2002). Field estimates of age and reproductive status were recorded.

Adult female polar bears in the 2000s in both areas were fitted with TAW-4610H satellite radio collars (Telonics, Mesa, Arizona, USA). Satellite collars provided information on geographic location, internal transmitter temperature, and activity. Collars were programmed to transmit during one six-hour period each day on 4-day intervals. In the 2000s, all adult male polar bears and subadults of both sexes were fitted with SPOT-5 S227 satellite radio transmitters (Wildlife Computers, Redmond, Washington, USA) attached to the ear similar to numbered plastic ear tags used in conventional studies (right ear). The SPOT-5 transmitters weighed 32 g and 60 g with attachment system (Born et al. 2010). Ear transmitters were duty cycled to extend battery life, with most tags transmitting on 4-day intervals and others on daily intervals. Satellite

tags transmitted around noon local time each day and were programmed so that several locations were received per transmission day.

*Data filtering and sub-sampling* – Data on locations and transmitter status from all polar bears were collected via the Argos Location Service Plus system (Toulouse, France). Location qualities are assigned by ARGOS to each position, with location qualities of 0–3 estimated to have errors of 1.5 km or less and those categorized as ‘A,’ ‘B,’ or ‘Z’ have no predicted accuracy. Unrealistic and poor quality locations were removed using a speed and angle filter in R version 2.13.2 (R Development Core Team 2012) using the package ‘argosfilter’ (Freitas et al. 2008). Positions exceeding a maximum between location travel velocity (10 km/h based on previous movement studies of polar bears, Laidre et al. 2013) and angle (measured from the track between three successive locations; set to the default) were removed by the filtering algorithm. The resulting locations for each bear were next reduced to a single position per day to reduce autocorrelation bias, standardize temporal sampling, and address the effects of variable duty cycling among the tags. To obtain a daily position for each tag, the first, best quality location within the period of peak satellite passage was selected. Daily positions, after filtering and optimal daily position selection, only consisted of ARGOS qualities 1–3. Distances between successive daily positions were calculated as the great circle route and used to compute minimum daily displacements.

As a result of variable experimental objectives in both subpopulations and decades, different duty cycles were used for tags in an effort to extend battery life or gather information from specific time periods. The 1990s collars were programmed to transmit on varying and intermittent intervals, ranging from 1 to 6 days, while the 2000s collars were all on a 4-day cycle. We sub-sampled the 1990s data and created a strict 4-, 5- or 6- day interval time series for each

individual to best match the 2000s data. This ensured that the impact of serial autocorrelation was consistent.

Captured polar bears were classified as independent adult male (AM), adult female (AF), subadult male (SM), subadult female (SF), or dependent cubs (cub of year COY, yearling YRL or 2-year old 2YR). We also classified the habitat type where the bear was first located and captured into three categories– pack ice (open or loose ice with leads and cracks), fast ice (sea ice attached to land with no open water), glacier ice (consolidated glacier ice at glacier fronts), as well as captures on land.

Data were divided into seasons: Spring (March – July, which included the peak of sea-ice coverage and initiation of sea-ice break-up), Summer (August – October, which included the end of break-up and the on-land period) and Winter (November – February, which included the freeze-up period and time when bears went back out on the sea ice). All denning periods were identified (maternity and shelter dens) (Escajeda 2016) and removed from RSF models. RSF models were only conducted on AFs to enable comparison with the 1990s. Bears with < 3 locations were removed from analyses as this was likely due to transmitter failure immediately after capture. Ages of polar bears were provisionally estimated in the field and later confirmed more accurately from counting of cementum growth layers of a pre-molar extracted during capture following methods in Calvert and Ramsay (1998). Adult females were defined as  $\geq 5$  years old and adult males as  $\geq 6$  years old. Age group status as determined in the field was verified based on tooth analyses.

We assigned each polar bear location to its respective subpopulation boundary (starting point or origin as well as the boundary where the bear was located at each time step) based on the boundaries recognized by the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG 2010).

*Basis for comparison of the 1990s and 2000s BB satellite telemetry data* – Polar bears within the subpopulation boundaries of BB are treated as belonging to a single management unit. The bears range over the entire Baffin Bay with the majority of bears spending the summer on Baffin Island during the ice-free period. There were differences in capture locations between decades (Figure 2.1), and although these captures were all within the bounds of the BB subpopulation per PBSG (2010) they were captured in different areas and seasons. Thus we conducted analyses to ensure that the movement of the bears was comparable across periods. In the 1990s, n=43 adult females were collared between 1991 and 1995. Approximately 72% of these were captured on land on Baffin Island in fall. In the 2000s, all n=38 adult females were captured on the spring fast ice and pack ice between 2009 and 2013 in West Greenland.

We spatially bounded the 1990s fall capture region along the coast of Baffin Island and examined what fraction of bears collared in the 2000s (in spring) in West Greenland used the same area the following fall. We defined fall as any period between August and November. All West Greenland 2000s bears were considered “independent” because they were captured in spring. Some individuals that remained resident during all seasons on or close to glaciers in Melville Bay and bears with collars that failed to transmit for >2.5 months after spring capture (which occurred in mid-April) were excluded from the calculations.

*Monthly and Seasonal Kernel Density Estimates* – Using a fixed kernel density approach (Worton 1989), we estimated the geographic areas characterized by a high probability of use by satellite-radio tagged AF polar bears in BB and KB. Kernel density estimators provide a non-parametric probability of using a given point in space and are reliably used to define the utilization distribution, or home range, for marine and terrestrial wildlife (Kie et al. 2010).

We calculated Gaussian bivariate normal kernel density estimates for each subpopulation (BB, KB, and KB West), in each decade, and for each month (n=12) and season (n=3). Kernel Density Estimates (KDEs) were calculated using the "bkde2D" function in "KernSmooth" R package (Wand 1994, Wand et al. 1995). The sample size of tagged AF differed between the 1990s and 2000s (Table 2.2, Table 2.3). To account for any potential bias in the KDEs or the fraction of overlap between decades due to differing numbers of AFs we randomly sampled with replacement from the pool of AF bears in each the two decades (1990s and 2000s) so that the sample sizes of collared bears were equivalent during each time period (n=38 bears in BB in both decades, n=12 bears in KB in both decades). We sampled bears with replacement 1,000 times for each monthly and seasonal KDE and calculated the area of the 95% contour polygon (bounding 95% of the KDE surface volume). We produced a mean and bootstrapped standard error (SE) for monthly and seasonal home ranges, calculated the fraction of overlap for each time period, and statistically compared time periods. We used the 'intersect' tool in ArcGIS to identify overlapping home ranges between subpopulations. We also estimated the proportion of home range overlap between the 1990s and the 2000s (Fieberg and Kochanny 2005) based on the bootstrapped mean. The cell size was set to 6 km and bandwidth of 50 km (approximately 50% of the 4-day movement step of AFs in this study). Cell size determines the smoothness of the resulting prediction, but has minimal impact on kernel density estimation relative to bandwidth selection. The bandwidth controls the width of the estimated kernel thereby determining how much regional variation is emphasized.

*Changes in Median Latitude* – We also calculated median latitude and longitude values for the 1990s and 2000s using pooled data from all AFs by season. The north-south orientation of the BB and KB subpopulation ranges allowed for this comparison. We compared changes in

median latitude and longitude across decades with t-tests at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . In the 1990s KB, all bears were caught along eastern Ellesmere Island (i.e., western KB) whereas bears were captured in both western and eastern KB in the 2000s. We performed a sensitivity analyses to evaluate this sampling difference with a subset of the KB bears captured in the 2000s. This subset included only those bears captured along the coast of Ellesmere Island in western KB. We compared them to the sample from the 1990s to examine any bias in comparison across decades.

*Movements across Subpopulation Boundaries* – We considered each 4 to 6 day AF bear trajectory as a single sample and calculated the elapsed time spent in the subpopulation region of origin (defined as where the bear was captured and tagged). Specifically, we calculated the number of days until each polar bear left its subpopulation region of origin and plotted the time-until-departure for each subpopulation and decade. Bears that never left their region of origin still contributed follow-up time, but their observation time was censored at time of last transmission. Statistical methods for censored event times were used to construct “survival” curves (Kaplan-Meier) to characterize the distribution of exit times from BB or KB and test for differences among different subpopulations/decades (log-rank test of equality) with  $\alpha = 0.05$ . We considered two time scales for departure: (1) a departure from the region of origin to be any length of time (4 days minimum) and (2) a departure from the region of origin that was at least 30 days long.

For bears that were observed to leave their subpopulation region of origin we summarized which subpopulation they departed to and the month of departure. We contrasted departures between BB and KB and across decades. As there were two capture seasons in the

1990s (spring in Melville Bay and summer on Baffin Island) we also tested whether capture season impacted the time until departure from the region of origin.

### Recaptures and Harvest Recoveries of Marked Bears

Bears included in this study were marked in springtime (April – May) or fall (August – October) during three periods; 1991-1997, 2005-2007 and 2009-2014. From 1991 to 1997, 881 and 141 bears were captured and physically marked with ear tags and lip tattoos as part of studies in BB and KB, respectively (Taylor et al. 2005, 2008). In preparation for genetic mark-recapture studies in BB and KB commencing 2011, tissue samples collected from these bears were subsequently genotyped in 2011 with two exceptions: 1) bears that were known to have been harvested between 1991 and 2011 and 2) bears whose known or estimated age would have been greater than 35 years in 2011. In total, this dataset consisted of 650 individuals marked in the 1990s that would have been  $\leq 35$  years old and had not been harvested by the time genetic sampling began in 2011. Samples for genotyping were available for 635 of the 650 individuals. Genotyping followed methods described elsewhere in this report (Chapter 5).

From 2005 to 2007, 1518 bears in DS were physically marked (and subsequently genotyped) as part of a mark-recapture study (Peacock et al. 2013). From 2011 to 2013, 1111 bears were biopsy darted along western BB (Canada) and genotyped. From 2009 to 2013, 143 bears were physically marked and genotyped or biopsy darted and genotyped in eastern BB (Greenland). From 2012 to 2014, 129 bears were physically marked and genotyped or biopsy darted and genotyped in KB.

Recapture or harvest recovery of physically or genetically marked individuals was detected by two means. Prior to 2011, when biopsy darting began, marked BB and KB



individuals were identifiable by ear tags and lip tattoos. During this period, recaptures of marked individuals were recorded during physical capture sampling in BB, KB, and surrounding subpopulations. Harvest recoveries of marked bears were detected via hunter returns of ear tags and / or lip tattoos as part of the on-going harvest monitoring program across all subpopulations in Canada and Greenland (Peacock et al. 2012). From 2011 onwards, all marked individuals were genotyped and some were both physically marked and genotyped. Recapture or harvest recovery of marked individuals was detected by physical marks recorded during capture sampling and harvest monitoring or by matching the genotypes of marked bears to samples collected during capture sampling, biopsy darting or harvest monitoring.

Although recaptures and harvest recoveries of marked bears from BB and KB have been previously reported (Taylor and Lee 1995, Taylor et al. 2001, Peacock et al. 2012), we incorporated additional data to supplement and update these analyses. We focused on three areas. To facilitate interpretation of results from the recent genetic mark-recapture studies in BB and KB (Chapters 5 and 10) we examined recaptures and recoveries of individuals marked between 2011 and 2014 to test the assumption that bears marked during these studies remained within their original subpopulations over the sampling period. For bears marked in the 1990s in BB and KB, we examined the number and sex of individuals recovered in the harvest up to 2014 to assess the degree of movement amongst subpopulations over the long term and to test the hypothesis that these movements are sex biased. Finally, we examined 3 sequential, intensive mark-recapture sampling sessions in BB (1991-97 and 2011-13) and neighboring DS (2005-07), to assess movements across the BB-DS boundary.

We incorporated capture, recapture or recovery events for which the location of bears was recorded at time of observation using a GPS. Sex was determined by physical examination

or genotyping (Chapter 5 and 11). For bears marked between 1991 and 2008, age was determined based on previous capture history, known age (in the case of cubs and yearlings) or estimated from counts of annular rings in an extracted vestigial premolar tooth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998). For bears “marked” from 2009 to 2013, the age of most individuals (i.e., those remotely biopsied along eastern Baffin Island, in contrast to those immobilized and handled in NW Greenland and in Kane Basin) could not be determined since they were not physically handled and teeth were not available for aging. Instead, age class (cub-of-the-year, yearling, sub-adult [ages 2 – 4], and adult) was estimated from the air at a range of 3-7 meters above ground. Age-class was later verified in some bears from previous or future captures in which an individual was captured and physically examined or where an individual was matched via DNA to membership in a known family at some past or future point. We assessed the accuracy of this system for estimating the age-class and sex of polar bears using a sample of BB bears of known age-class (Appendix B). For all capture-recapture analyses, recaptures of an individual within the same season and year of capture were excluded. Statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS package (Version 24.0, IBM Corp. 2016).

## **2.3. Results**

### Overall Study Area

The boundaries of the BB polar bear subpopulation (BB) encompass an area ~1 million km<sup>2</sup> in Baffin Bay, covering portions of Baffin Island and all of Bylot Island (66.2°N to 73.8°N) in Nunavut/ Canada, as well as parts of West and Northwest Greenland (66.0°N to 77.0°N; Taylor et al. 2005). BB is bounded by Greenland to the east, Baffin Island to the west, the North Water polynya in the north and Davis Strait to the south (Figure 1.1, Figure 2.1). Three

communities in Nunavut and 37 communities in Greenland harvest bears from BB, although the majority of the Greenland harvest is taken between *ca.* 72° and 76° N. Baffin Bay is ice-covered in winter but typically ice-free in summer. During late spring and summer break-up, sea ice recedes from Greenland westward across Baffin Bay; the last remnants of ice typically occur off the coast of Baffin Island. Most polar bears remain on the sea ice as it recedes and then come ashore to spend the ice-retreat period on Baffin and Bylot Islands (Taylor et al. 2005). A small number of bears remain on land in northwestern Greenland throughout the ice-retreat period (Born 1995, Born et al. 2011, this study).

The KB polar bear subpopulation covers roughly 150,000 km<sup>2</sup> and spans portions of Nunavut, Canada, including Ellesmere Island, as well as northwestern Greenland (Taylor et al. 2008). The subpopulation ranges over Kane Basin, Nares Strait, Smith Sound and adjacent fjords on eastern Ellesmere Island and Northwest Greenland (the Qaanaaq area). It is bounded to the north by the Arctic Basin subpopulation (via the Kennedy Channel), to the south by the BB and LS subpopulations, and to the west by Norwegian Bay (NW). Kane Basin forms part of the Arctic archipelago ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008); sea ice remains present in the northern range (i.e., Nares Strait-Kane Basin) throughout the year, largely due to the influx of polar pack ice from Arctic Basin, and reaches a minimum in late summer.

### Genetics

The multi-locus  $F_{ST}$  estimates were generally low, although statistically significant. The  $F_{ST}$  analysis suggested a separation into three groups (1) BB-KB, (2) LS and (3) DS (L.W. Andersen, Institute of Bioscience, Århus University, Denmark, personal communication). This subdivision is in accordance with Paetkau et al. (1999), Peacock et al. (2015) and Malenfant et

al. (2016). The analyses based on the 8 markers showed that the genetic resolution was low. Bayesian clustering methods had difficulties identifying more closely related groups without using spatial information (i.e., site of sampling or harvest).

Using the spatial information (i.e., GPS positions of individual samples sites) implemented in GENELAND a group structure was indicated where adult females and males sampled during the winter-spring season were divided in an eastern and a western group corresponding to BB-KB and LS, and a northern and a southern group corresponding to BB-KB and DS (L.W. Andersen, Institute of Bioscience, Århus University, Denmark, personal communication) (Table 2.1).

### General Movements from Telemetry

*Baffin Bay* – All but n=12 of the 43 bears collared in BB between 1991 and 1995 were captured on land on Baffin Island in fall. The remaining 12 were captured on the sea ice in spring (n=3 off Baffin Island and n=9 in Melville Bay, West Greenland). The 1990s collared bears transmitted through 1997 (Figure 2.3). Overall in the 1990s 72% were captured in fall on land inside the sampled area on BI (i.e., the area in which biopsies were collected for the genetic MR assessment), 6% were captured on the sea ice off the Baffin Island coast, and 21% were captured on the sea ice in Melville Bay, West Greenland. In the 2000s, all n=38 adult females (100%) were collared between 2009-2013 on the spring sea ice in West Greenland and transmitting through April 2015 (Figure 2.1).

Adult females were tracked between ~6 months and four years. Adult male tracking durations were shorter (~2 months) due to ear attachments. Telemetry data were truncated at 01

April 2015 so that analyses could be completed on time for reporting deadlines, therefore locations from collared bears beyond that date were not included here.

Adult females were captured and collared in West Greenland in all reproductive states (alone, as mating pairs, with COYs= cub of the year, yearlings, and 2-year old cubs) (Figure 2.2). General patterns of movements show broad coverage of the BB region during the tracking period in each year (Figures 2.4-2.11). There was a series of collar failures in 2012 that resulted from poor release mechanisms (Figure 2.7), therefore tracking data from bears captured in that year had shorter durations. There was some exchange between BB and KB. Most bears followed the general pattern of moving from West Greenland to the coast of Baffin Island in the fall. However a new pattern was observed that was not detected in the 1990s satellite telemetry data. Of the 38 adult females collared in BB in the 2000s,  $n=7$  (18.4%) remained in the glacier ice of Melville Bay for the entire tracking durations. For all but one of these bears, where collar failure occurred early, this period was between 1 and 2 years (with some bears still transmitting from Melville Bay after April 2015). Bears that remained in Melville Bay were captured in all years when the area was sampled (2011-2013). No bears showed this behavior in the 1990s, and only one of the tracked bears made a single excursion onto the fast ice in Melville Bay (Taylor et al. 2001 figure 3, and Figure 2.3). Of note, this comparison may include some bias because only one bear was captured and given a satellite collar at glacier fronts in Melville Bay in the 1990s (Taylor et al. 2001 figure 1) even though the area was searched. Unfortunately the satellite collar on this bear only transmitted for one day. Additionally  $n=2$  of 38 bears captured in the 2000s moved back and forth between Melville Bay and KB but never visited Baffin Island. Furthermore, another two individuals in the 2000s moved between Melville Bay and KB, but in subsequent years also moved to Baffin Island.

*Kane Basin* – In the 1990s, 12 adult females were captured and collared in KB along the coast of Ellesmere Island (Figure 2.11). In the 2000s, 20 adult females were captured and collared in spring along both Ellesmere Island and the western coast of Greenland (Figure 2.1). Bears captured in 2012 remained in KB subpopulation boundaries for the entire tracking period (through the period when collars were removed, April 2014) whereas with bears captured in 2013 there was more variability in movements, with individuals moving into Baffin Bay and Jones Sound. No bears collared in KB moved to Melville Bay though contact with two individuals was lost close to the West Greenland coast (Figures 2.12-2.14). One bear collared in KB in 2013 moved along the northern coast of Greenland in the Arctic Basin to Severnaya Zemlya and then to Franz Josef Land (Figure 2.14 inset). This individual was considered an outlier and excluded from further analyses. Adult males captured and satellite tagged with ear tags in KB (Figure 2.15) remained in KB during their tracking periods, which were less than 30 days.

#### Basis for Comparison of the 1990s and 2000s BB Satellite Telemetry Data

The analysis examined if polar bears collared on the sea ice in spring in the 2000s (in West Greenland) represented the same subpopulation sampled in fall on Baffin Island (Figure 2.1). This was conducted to ensure the comparison of movements and habitat use between the two telemetry sets was valid. Overall 92% of the bears collared in West Greenland in the 2000s entered the 1990s capture region on Baffin Island in fall, providing a solid basis for comparing the movements of polar bears captured in spring and in fall as defined by a polygon encompassing all the 1990s fall captures. Bears collared in West Greenland used nearly the entire Baffin Island coastline in fall and were spread over the whole capture region used in the

1990s, with the exception of the area around Cape Dyer. These bears thus also were representative of the bears biopsied for the genetic MR in the 2000s.

### Subpopulation KDEs and Overlap of Ranges

*Baffin Bay* – In BB in the 1990s, 95% kernel ranges for polar bears were similar in winter, spring and summer, ranging from approximately 700,000 – 900,000 km<sup>2</sup>. In the 2000s, seasonal ranges were significantly smaller in all seasons, ranging from 255,000 to 729,000 km<sup>2</sup>. When the 1990s ranges were compared to the 2000s, there was a significant reduction in the size of 95% seasonal ranges in all seasons (reduction of 20% area in winter and 30% in spring), with the most marked reduction being a 60% decline in area of the summer range, reduced from a mean of 716,767 km<sup>2</sup> (SE 57,850) to a mean of 255,992 km<sup>2</sup> (SE 28,627), based on 1,000 bootstrap samples standardized for sample size (Table 2.4, Figure 2.16).

In all months except May, the home range sizes for the 2000s were significantly smaller than those in the 1990s (Figure 2.17). In some spring months 95% monthly ranges were reduced by 30% in late winter and spring (February, March and April) and in summer months by 50% (August and September), with a difference of about 325,000-375,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Table 2.4, Figure 2.18). Home range sizes were calculated with and without the resident Melville Bay bears to test for changes in results with inclusion of resident bears. There were minimal changes to the home range sizes and no differences in the significance of results with or without these residents.

*Kane Basin* – Seasonally, 95% ranges in KB in the 1990s fell between 89,000 and 203,000 km<sup>2</sup> whereas in the 2000s 95% ranges were between 152,000 and 192,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Table 2.4, Figures 2.19-2.21). In most months there was a reverse pattern to that in BB, where 95% range sizes in the 2000s were generally larger than those in the 1990s. However the pattern of

increased range size was statistically significant only for June-September ( $p < 0.001$ ). Increases in summer range size were detected both when including all KB 2000s bears and those collared in west KB only.

### Overlap of Ranges between Decades

The percent overlap quantifies the similarity in space between the home ranges across decades. In BB, the overlap of 1990s and 2000s home ranges was lowest in the summer months (July through October), ranging from 21-34% overlap. It was higher in spring and mid-winter, reaching a maximum of 61% in June, however largely was  $< 50\%$  in all months. The low overlap values reflected the significant contraction of the range in most months in BB when comparing the two decades.

In KB there was a higher level of overlap in ranges between decades, ranging from about 50% in November and December to 98% in September. In general, KB bears used similar areas between decades, however in 2000s these areas were larger. When the 1990s KB bears were compared with the KB bears tagged in the western portion of the area (KB-West 2000s), the overlap was similar. In general, bears captured and tagged in KB west did not differ from the full sample of KB bears in the 2000s, though those in the western portion of KB were more likely to move into BB.

### Changes in Median Latitude from Telemetry

We detected significant shifts north in the median subpopulation latitude in all seasons in BB. In winter, the shift was nearly 5 degrees north (median 68.8 in the 1990s, median 73.5 in the 2000s,  $p < 0.001$ ), while in the spring the shift north was about 3 degrees ( $p < 0.001$ ) and in



summer < 1 degree ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2.5, Figure 2.22). In KB there were also significant shifts north in median latitude in spring and summer but they were smaller, ~ 1 to 1.5 degrees (Table 2.5, Figure 2.23). There was no change in median latitude in KB during winter ( $p = 0.07$ ). We tested both all KB 2000s bears and those in KB-west and there were no differences in significance.

### Movements across Subpopulation Boundaries from Telemetry

We examined the trajectories and departure from regions of origin BB ( $n = 43$  AFs in 1990s,  $n = 38$  AFs in 2000s) and KB ( $n = 12$  AFs in 1990s,  $n = 20$  AFs in 2000s) for bears tracked up to 700 days in duration. Of bears captured in BB in the 1990s when departure of any length (minimum 4 days due to duty cycling) was considered, there was movement to two subpopulations: Davis Strait ( $n = 14$  bears) and Lancaster Sound ( $n = 12$  bears). In the 2000s, bears moved to three subpopulations: Davis Strait ( $n = 3$ ), Lancaster Sound ( $n = 3$ ) and Kane Basin ( $n = 5$ ) (Table 2.6). Overall polar bears in the 2000s were significantly less likely to leave BB than in the 1990s ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2.7), with large reductions in the number of bears moving into Davis Strait and Lancaster Sound as observed in the 1990s. For example at 100 days after capture, approximately 58% of bears were remaining in BB in the 1990s, whereas at the same time step in the 2000s, over 90% of the collared bears were still in the area. At 300 days after capture, approximately 60% of the bears had departed from BB in the 1990s where at the same time step in the 2000s about <10% had left. Capture season in BB in the 1990s (spring vs. summer) was not a factor in timing of departure from BB, there was no difference in time until departure for the two decades ( $p = 0.562$ ) for either length of departure.

In KB there were no significant differences in percentage of bears departing over the decades studied ( $p=0.339$ ). In Kane Basin, 2 AF polar bears in the 1990s moved out of the area (one to Arctic Basin and one to Baffin Bay) (Table 2.6), and movement in the 2000s was slightly higher and included departure to Lancaster Sound, but was not significantly different ( $p=0.351$ ).

The timing of departures over the annual cycle varied significantly in BB (Figure 2.24, Figure 2.25). In the 1990s, bears were significantly more likely to depart from BB to Davis Strait during the winter or early spring months when the area was ice covered (November and April). Bears that departed to Lancaster Sound left BB in late spring and summer (June-September) to move on to remnants of sea ice in the archipelago area ( $p=0.002$ , Fisher's exact test). This pattern was weakly present in the 2000s although sample sizes were very low.

The number of boundary crossings by individual bears is shown in Table 2.9. Of the bears that departed from BB (crossed the BB subpopulation border) in the 1990s when departures of all time steps were considered, 5 of 26 did not return to BB (19%) at any point during the tracking period. Of the bears that departed in the 2000s, 3 of 11 (27%) did not return to BB.

When the threshold for departure was longer ( $>30$  days) patterns were similar. Bears were significantly more likely to depart from BB in the 1990s and departures primarily occurred to Davis Strait and Lancaster Sound (Tables 2.10 and 2.11). For AF departures based on the 30 day time step, fewer bears left the subpopulations of origin (Figure 2.25). There were similar differences in proportion of bears departing BB; significantly more bears departed in the 1990s vs. the 2000s ( $p=0.009$ ). The timing of departures was similar but sample sizes were smaller (Table 2.12). Of the bears that departed from BB (crossed the BB border) in the 1990s when departures  $>30$  days were considered, 56% of the 1990s BB bears did not depart from the BB

boundaries, where as 79% of the BB bears in the 2000s did not depart from the BB boundaries (Table 2.13).

#### Recaptures and Recoveries during Genetic Mark-Recapture Studies, 2011-14

From 2011 to 2014, the harvest of polar bears in BB, KB and all surrounding subpopulations was monitored genetically by genotyping of tissue samples from harvested bears. Of the bears genetically marked in BB during the recent mark-recapture study, 2011-2013, 85 individuals were recovered in the harvest, as detected by genotyping (Table 2.14). Of these individuals, 84 (99%) were recovered in the BB harvest and the other bear was harvested in DS. For bears marked in KB from 2012-2014, no individuals were recovered in the harvest in KB or surrounding subpopulations. Also during this period of harvest monitoring, an additional 12 bears marked in the 1990s in BB and KB were recovered in the harvest. Eleven were marked in BB, 1 was marked in KB. All of these 'old' 1990s marks were recovered in BB.

Of the bears genetically marked in BB during 2011-2013, there were 207 recapture events during mark-recapture sampling in BB and KB from 2011 to 2014, including >1 recapture of some individuals (Table 2.15). Two hundred and six (> 99%) of these recapture events occurred in BB and one BB mark was recaptured in KB. For bears marked in KB during 2012-2014, there were 29 recapture events during mark-recapture sampling in BB and KB from 2011 to 2014. Twenty-eight (> 96%) of these recaptures occurred in KB and one KB mark was recaptured in BB.

During this recent period of mark-recapture sampling there were 66 recapture events of bears marked in either BB or KB during 1991-1997. Fifty-four of these events were of

individuals marked in BB. Twelve were of KB individuals. For the 54 ‘old’ BB marks, all were recaptured in BB. Of the ‘old’ KB marks, 8 and 4 were recaptured in KB and BB, respectively.

For bears that were biopsied on more one occasion during the ice-free seasons in BB between 2011 and 2013 we examined the straight line distances between mark and recapture locations. Intervals between capture and recapture were obviously constrained to a ranged from 1-2 years. Median distances between mark-recapture varied between age and sex classes (Figure 2.26; Kruskal-Wallis,  $H = 18.62$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ). Bears initially marked as yearlings were recaptured at a location farther from their initial capture site than COY and adult females. Adult males also had larger mark-recapture distances than COY (Figures 2.26 and 2.27).

#### Long-term Harvest Recoveries of BB and KB Marks

Of the 881 bears marked in BB from 1991 to 1997, 181 individuals were recovered in the harvest in Canada and Greenland between 1991 and 2014 (Table 2.16). Eighty-three percent of recoveries occurred within BB. Recoveries of marked bears outside BB tended to be male-biased (3.29 males per female) relative to recoveries within BB (1.85 males per female), but this tendency was not statistically significant (Fisher’s Exact test,  $P = 0.483$ ).

Of the 141 bears marked in KB from 1991 to 1997, 21 individuals were recovered in the harvest in Canada and Greenland between 1991 and 2014. Forty-eight percent of these recoveries were within KB. There was no significant sex bias in recoveries within versus outside KB (Fisher’s Exact test,  $P = 0.656$ ).

#### Movement of Bears between BB and DS

One hundred and fifty-five bears marked in BB during 1991 – 1997 were recovered in the harvest up to 2005, including 11 recoveries in DS. From 2005 to 2007, a total of 2,128 bears comprising 1,518 unique individuals were captured in DS. There were 13 recapture events of bears previously marked in BB recaptured during this sampling in DS.

From 2009 to 2013, 1,253 unique individuals (1,623 capture events) were recorded in BB. Sixteen (1%) of these individuals were originally marked in DS. In sum, from a total of 2,771 bears marked in either BB or DS during 2005 – 2013, we detected 29 instances (ca. 1%) where marked bears moved from one subpopulation to the other.

The straight line distance of these 29 inter-subpopulation movements was independent of the capture-recapture interval which ranged from 4 to 15 years (Table 2.15, Figure 2.28). Seventy percent of these individuals were originally captured and marked within 100 km of the boundary between BB and DS (Table 2.16, Figure 2.29). In comparison to other bears marked in these subpopulations, individuals that made inter-subpopulation movements were found significantly closer to the boundary ( $\chi^2 = 169.48$ , d.f. = 11,  $p < 0.001$ ). Despite extensive marking of bears throughout the range of both subpopulations the recorded inter-population movements were clustered near the boundary (Figure 2.1).

## **2.4. Discussion**

### Genetics

The results of the analyses of migration direction and detection of first generation migrants were subtle and influenced by the lack of differentiation between Baffin Bay and Kane Basin. However the overall migration direction appeared to flow from Lancaster Sound and

Davis Strait to Baffin Bay and Kane Basin. More markers would be needed to verify this (L.W. Andersen, Institute of Bioscience, Århus University, Denmark, personal communication).

Although the genetic resolution was low due to use of only 8 nuclear markers pre-selected for other purposes these analyses support findings in previous studies (Paetkau et al. 1999, Peacock et al. 2015, Malenfant et al. 2016) that (1) Kane Basin and Baffin Bay polar bears are not genetically different, and that (2) polar bears from Kane Basin-Baffin Bay are genetically different from polar bears from Lancaster Sound and Davis Strait.

### Movements and Telemetry

BB bears home ranges have become significantly smaller, by a third to a half between the 1990s and 2000s. There is <50% overlap between areas used by bears in the 90s and what they use in the 2000s. This is consistent even when resident bears that remained in Melville Bay glacier fronts were excluded (removing any possible bias in comparisons across decades). There is a significant shift in median latitude northward in the 2000s for the core subpopulation range when compared to the 1990s. Overall analyses also indicate that BB bears are significantly less likely to depart from the BB subpopulation boundaries in the 2000s than the 1990s.

During the fall, most bears in BB are distributed on land or on the remaining pack-ice along the coastline of Baffin Island and associated islands (Ferguson et al. 1998, 2001, Taylor et al. 2001). Information from polar bear hunters with extensive experience from the Melville Bay area (Born et al. 2011) and miscellaneous observations (e.g., Taylor et al. 2001) suggest that some bears may also be present along the NW Greenland coast during the open-water season, in particular in Melville Bay. However, in this study for the first time we documented resident bears in Melville Bay via satellite telemetry. These bears remained in NW Greenland year-

round, in some cases >2 years within a series of glacier fronts. Satellite telemetry studies of bear movements in the 1990s failed to demonstrate this behavior (Taylor et al. 2001) however only one adult female bear was collared on the fast ice in Melville Bay (at a glacier front) and the satellite radio only transmitted for one day (E.W. Born, pers. comm.).

KB bears home ranges have become overall larger, in some cases significantly so and twice the size in summer. There is more overlap in home ranges for KB between the 90s and 00s, between about 50 and 98%, probably because the subpopulation area is smaller and because the ice loss has not been as extreme (or bears can use more of the southernmost habitat still). However, a likely explanation may be that the sea ice in the Kane Basin region has become less consolidated (e.g., Born et al. 2011) and now resembles that of the annual sea-ice ecoregion (rather than the archipelago region with year-round consolidated sea ice, cf Amstrup et al. 2008). This shift in habitat likely forces bears to have larger-scale movements and large home ranges, following well with that found by Ferguson et al. (2001). There were also significant shifts north in median latitude in KB in spring and summer from the 90s, though the variability has increased in the range of latitudes used and no change during winter.

### Changes in Polar Bear Densities in Melville Bay, Northwest Greenland

Another result of the comparison between ranges and movements is the apparent increased use of Melville Bay, northwest Greenland by BB bears. The telemetry data collected in the 2000s indicate an increased use in both spring and summer (Figure 2.16) when compared to the 1990s (see also Figure 2.3). Of 43 polar bears that were tracked by use of satellite telemetry during the 1990s remarkably few made excursions from offshore BB pack ice onto landfast ice

in NW Greenland (Figure 2.3, Taylor et al. 2001: Figure 3, p. 696; Born and Dietz 2009: Figure 18, p. 82). This is in contrast to heavy use of the area in the 2000s (Figure 2.9).

During the 1990s spring sampling 1992 and 1993, 55 hours of active searching was spent on the fast ice, glacier fronts, and active offshore pack ice between *ca.* 74° N and *ca.* 76° N in northwest Greenland, including offshore areas 100-150 km from the coast (i.e., ferry time excluded; Born unpublished data). In both years, there was little sign of bear activity on the fast ice in Melville Bay and along glacier fronts even though ~ 25% of the active search time was flown over fast ice and along glacier fronts. Only four of 36 bears were tagged in fast ice and glacier fronts the 1990s (Born et al. 1992, Rosing-Asvid 1993). In contrast, in 2011-2013, 85 active search hours were concentrated in the Melville Bay area north of the settlement Kullorsuaq. In each year there were signs of recent polar bear activity on the fast ice and along glacier fronts, including the consolidated pack ice in Melville Bay. Approximately 82% of captures occurred in fast ice or consolidated pack ice, and of those 25% were along glacier fronts. Differences between 1992-1993 and 2011-2013 in the allocation of sampling effort and number of polar bears captured reflect an increased density of polar bears using landfast ice and glacial fronts in Melville Bay in the 2010s. The apparent change in densities in spring time Melville Bay is worth noting and is consistent with information obtained from experienced polar bear hunters that there has been an increased occurrence of polar bears in nearshore areas in NW Greenland (Born et al. 2011).

### Recoveries from Marked Bears

Use of tag recoveries or recaptures is a relatively coarse means of assessing subpopulation closure for the purpose of mark-recapture analyses, but it can facilitate the



inclusion of data from large numbers of individuals, relative to satellite telemetry. The probability of detecting the movements of individuals between subpopulations depends on numerous factors, including the number of marks deployed, the intensity of sampling effort following marking, and the intensity of harvest. Additionally, the detection of movement amongst subpopulations does not provide a means of quantifying rates of permanent emigration or immigration. Nevertheless, data on recaptures and harvest recoveries of marked bears provide a supplemental line of evidence to support subpopulation delineations based on more detailed methods such as telemetry data analyses (Taylor et al. 2001) and genetics (Paetkau et al. 1999, Peacock et al. 2015).

### Short-term Movements

During the recent genetic mark-recapture studies in BB and KB (2011-2014), we documented very low levels of recapture or harvest recovery of bears outside their subpopulation of origin. It should be noted that bears marked in the final year of these studies had a zero probability of recapture or recovery because harvest monitoring and biopsy darting were not extended beyond the last year of marking. However, bears marked in the first two years of these studies were available for recapture or recovery, subject to rates of natural mortality. The total number of bears marked in years 1 and 2 was equivalent to ~34% and ~25% of the estimated subpopulation size in BB and KB, respectively (Chapters 5 and 10). Despite marking a large proportion of the subpopulation, instances of emigration were  $\leq 1\%$  of the recaptures and recoveries of BB marks. Similarly in KB, documented cases of emigration comprised  $< 4\%$  of recaptures. Amongst these findings, rates of harvest recovery provide a more complete picture of movement amongst subpopulations because harvest was monitored genetically in BB, KB and

all surrounding subpopulations throughout the study period. In contrast, capture effort only took place in BB and KB during the study.

We acknowledge that this work comprised a relatively short window of time, especially since harvest monitoring and biopsy darting were not extended beyond the last year of marking. However, our findings suggest that the existing subpopulation boundaries continue to be relevant for harvest management purposes and subpopulation monitoring. Bears marked in BB or KB tended to remain within their respective subpopulations at least over the short term. These units can be surveyed by means of mark-recapture or aerial survey with a reasonable degree of confidence in the assumption of closure during short-term studies.

### Long-Term Harvest Recoveries

Over the period 1979-2009, Peacock et al. (2012) found that amongst harvest recoveries of bears marked in BB, 82% were recovered in BB versus other subpopulations. Using a subset of the same data plus newer recoveries, we obtained a similar level of recovery (83%) within BB. These findings imply that bears exhibit a reasonably high degree of long-term fidelity to this geographically defined unit, which is consistent with estimates of site fidelity derived from mark-recapture analyses (Chapter 5, but note that the site fidelity parameter pertains to the study area and not necessarily the subpopulation). In contrast, less than half of the KB marks deployed in the 1990s have been recovered in the harvest in KB, although the vast majority of recoveries occurred during the 1990s and early 2000s. This suggests that fidelity to KB may be lower than observed in BB. However, we note that the harvest rate in KB is an order of magnitude smaller than surrounding subpopulations; mean annual harvests in KB and BB have been 9.3 and 163 bears, respectively, over the period 1992-2014 (Chapter 8 in this report). This difference in

sampling effort (specifically, the small sample sizes in KB) may contribute to the observed differences in fidelity between the subpopulations.

### Sex and Age Class

Sex and age differences in movements and distribution patterns are well documented for many mammal species (e.g., Mabry et al. 2013). Until recently, studies of polar bear movements and the delineation of subpopulations have relied primarily on data collected from satellite collared adult females (e.g., Taylor et al. 2001, Amstrup et al. 2004, Parks et al. 2006, Cherry et al. 2013). Even now, studies of the movements of sub-adults and adult male polar bears are limited by available technology. Satellite transmitters attached to sub-adult and adult males have only lasted 4-5 months, limiting research to studies of seasonal movements and habitat use (Amstrup et al. 2001, Laidre et al. 2013). The extent to which subpopulation boundaries as currently defined reflect the long-term distribution of sub-adults and male polar bears therefore remains uncertain. This is an important area requiring on-going investigation because of the implications for defining biological populations or harvest management units that can be accurately monitored by methods such as mark-recapture.

Using data on the distance between capture and recapture locations, Taylor et al. (2001) found a tendency for sub-adults to exhibit longer-range movements than adults in BB and KB. Similar data from our study (2011-2013) suggest that mark-recapture distances were greater for bears initially marked as yearlings, relative to adult females and COY. This may reflect a degree of dispersal amongst young bears away from their maternal (natal) range post-weaning. This is a common phenomenon among mammals and is often male biased (Greenwood 1980), but sample sizes for yearlings in our study were insufficient to test for sex effects in mark-recapture

distances. However, using measures of genetic relatedness (kin structure analysis), Zeyl et al. (2009) demonstrated a slight male bias in effective dispersal of polar bears. Nevertheless, fidelity to natal range was relatively strong in that study, suggesting that regardless of sex, dispersal of offspring is unlikely to be a major factor in determining the broad scale (subpopulation) structure of polar bears. With harvest recoveries, the sex ratio of marked BB bears harvested outside BB tended to be male biased relative to recoveries within the subpopulation but not significantly so. Collectively, these findings provide some support for the notion that subpopulation boundaries, delineated using data on the movements of satellite collared adult females are relevant to polar bears of all sex and age classes as also suggested by Taylor et al. (2001).

#### Movement between Baffin Bay and Davis Strait

The boundary between the BB and DS subpopulations is not delineated by a landmass or area of open water that creates an obvious barrier to the movement of polar bears. During the winter and spring, this boundary is spanned by both land fast and pack ice that provides an easy platform for bears to move between these subpopulations (Stirling et al. 1980). Nevertheless, bears in these two subpopulations have consistently shown distinct differences in studies of genetics (Paetkau et al. 1999, Peacock et al. 2015), movements (Taylor et al. 2001) and diet (Thiemann et al. 2008), suggesting that there is a real boundary between them. This boundary is likely the result of ocean current patterns caused by a submarine ridge between SE Baffin Island and Central West Greenland and associated differences in patterns of sea-ice formation and break-up in Baffin Bay and Davis Strait, respectively (Taylor et al. 2001).

Since 1990, there have been 3 periods of intensive mark-recapture study in BB and DS. These data provided an opportunity to examine movements between DS and BB. Additionally, DS has likely undergone a substantial increase in abundance since the 1970s and presently has one of the highest densities of polar bears amongst subpopulations (Peacock et al. 2013). Furthermore it may be speculated that because of a higher rate of sea-ice loss in Davis Strait compared to Baffin Bay during the last decades (e.g., Laidre et al. 2015) an increased number of polar bears may have immigrated to BB from DS. We were therefore keen to examine the hypothesis that this apparent expansion happening concomitantly with sea-ice loss in Davis Strait had resulted in the movement of bears from DS to BB, thereby influencing our estimate of abundance for BB.

The intensity of marking effort (i.e., number of unique individuals marked) in these subpopulations was equivalent to 41% (BB 1991-97), 70% (DS 2005-07) and 44% (BB 2011-2013) of estimated abundance at the time of marking. Despite this extensive marking of bears throughout the seasonal ranges of both subpopulations we detected very few cases of movement between DS and BB. Approximately 1% of bears sampled in DS were recaptures of bears marked in BB and vice versa. Our results support the notion that the boundary between these two subpopulations remains relatively strong and does not support the hypothesis that subpopulation expansion and sea-ice loss in Davis Strait have resulted in a large-scale northward movement of DS bears into BB, at least during the period from 2005 to 2013.

Bears that were documented to have moved between BB and DS tended to be those originally captured close to the management unit boundary ( $< 100$  km). This clustering of inter-subpopulation movements around the boundary does not itself demonstrate the significance of the boundary as a barrier to movements. Instead it may reflect the high degree of fidelity that

BB and DS bears show to their seasonal on-shore range. A similar degree of fidelity has been previously documented in BB (Taylor et al. 2001) and other subpopulations (Stirling et al. 2004). Taylor et al. (2001) examined distances between capture and recapture locations for bears marked in BB during the 1990s finding that 59% were recaptured within 100 km of their original capture location. Amongst all BB bears marked between 2011 and 2013, 50 % (n = 166) of recaptures were within 100 km of initial capture location (GN unpublished data) suggesting that the tendency of local fidelity of BB bears has remained unchanged since the 1990s. Strong inter-annual fidelity to terrestrial habitat is further supported by our finding that distances between capture and recapture locations for bears that moved between DS and BB were independent of capture intervals ranging from 4 to 15 years. Bears appear to exhibit fidelity over long periods.

In conclusion, using data from satellite telemetry, recapture and / or harvest recovery of marked bears and genetic we found no evidence to suggest a change in the delineation of the BB and KB subpopulations. The boundaries of these subpopulations appear to be relevant from the stand point of mark-recapture or other forms of periodic survey and for harvest management purposes.

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**Table 2.1.** Polar bear samples (n = 1,364; sampling period: 2009-2014) from Baffin Bay (BB), Kane Basin (KB), Lancaster Sound (LS) and Davis Strait (DS) that were included in the population genetic analyses. The total sample was subdivided according to season, age category and sex for the analyses. A subset of 402 samples collected during winter and spring (2012-2014) represented all four subpopulations.

	BB	KB	LS	DS	N
	Biopsies and Harvest	Biopsies	Harvest	Harvest	Total
Period of sampling	2009-2014	2012-2014	2011-2013	2012-2013	
Total Sample	1051	99	142	72	1364
Winter-spring (WS) <sup>1</sup>	140	99	114	49	402
Winter-spring-adults (WSA) <sup>2</sup>	109	78	84	37	308
Winter-spring-subadults (WSS) <sup>2</sup>	31	21	30	12	94
Winter-spring-adults- females (WSAF) <sup>3</sup>	54	54	15	11	134
Winter-spring-adult- males (WSAM) <sup>3</sup>	55	24	69	26	174

<sup>1</sup>Winter defined as: November-February and spring defined as March-June

<sup>2</sup>A=adults and S=subadults

<sup>3</sup>F=females and M=males

**Table 2.2.** Sample sizes (number of individuals) polar bears captured and tagged with collars or ear tags in the 1990s and 2000s in BB and KB. In total 134 bears were tagged in BB and 46 bears were tagged in KB over two decades.

		AF	AM	SF	SM	2YR	TOTAL
1990s	BB	43					43
	KB	12					12
2000s	BB	38	30	4	6	13	91
	KB	20	9		5		34

**Table 2.3.** Breakdown of adult females (AF) collared in the 1990s and 2000s. Total n=113 AF bears over both decades and subpopulations.

		<b>AF alone</b>	<b>AF+AM</b>	<b>AF+COY</b>	<b>AF+YRL</b>	<b>AF+2YR</b>	<b>Sum</b>
1990s	BB	9		19	13	2	43
	KB	3		5	3	1	12
2000s	BB	10	2	6	12	8	38
	KB	5	1	7	3	4	20

**Table 2.4.** 95% mean kernel range sizes (in sq km) estimated from a bootstrap method for each of 38 bears in BB and 12 bears in KB by decade, month and season. The bootstrap was used to generate kernel range sizes based on equal sample sizes between decades (see Methods). Data are reported with bootstrapped SE of the mean in parentheses. Fraction of overlap is the 95% kernel probability area from the 1990s overlapped by the same in the 2000s. KB\_West is reported only for bears tagged in western KB for direct comparison to the 1990s (where no bears were tagged in East KB). Data here include all bears in BB, including the resident bears in Melville Bay, though we also investigated bootstrap range size values without resident bears and significance remained.

	BB				KB_All Bears				KB_West	
	1990s mean (SE)	2000s	P value comparing 95% area between decades	Overlap	1990s	2000s	P value comparing 95% area between decades	Overlap	2000s	Overlap (with KB ALL 1990s)
January	684,409 (60,692)	558,957 (56,594)	<0.001	0.40	86,556 (6,890)	163,892 (27,619)	0.007	0.77	175,730 (23,649)	0.77
February	707,387 (55,079)	513,732 (40,662)	0.005	0.39	105,788 (5,426)	171,441 (34,036)	0.057	0.81	183,981 (23,205)	0.81
March	852,935 (50,240)	580,767 (36,287)	<0.001	0.45	136,942 (15,859)	205,921 (49,119)	0.180	0.70	232,299 (38,259)	0.73
April	795,859 (45,652)	506,739 (26,529)	<0.001	0.46	131,963 (15,331)	183,184 (38,786)	0.219	0.73	180,913 (32,718)	0.69
May	564,658 (37,090)	473,825 (35,679)	0.078	0.58	130,730 (19,002)	122,598 (15,355)	0.741	0.68	115,925 (14,792)	0.69
June	521,410 (32,633)	430,766 (31,829)	0.047	0.61	68,696 (11,854)	124,227 (13,578)	<0.001	0.88	103,783 (9,942)	0.85

July	536,992	376,891	0.52	54,681	130,518	0.91	112,655	0.88
	(32,000)	(30,062)	<0.001	(7,986)	(12,414)	<0.001	(13,872)	
August	596,411	216,881	0.21	68,649	119,251	0.90	106,314	0.92
	(44,692)	(18,958)	<0.001	(12,391)	(13,419)	<0.001	(11,694)	
September	551,395	226,427	0.26	74,368	131,558	0.98	109,697	0.84
	(48,280)	(21,538)	<0.001	(13,130)	(15,871)	<0.001	(14,187)	
October	459,230	276,198	0.34	99,855	153,820	0.91	132,177	0.75
	(43,932)	(29,264)	<0.001	(15,807)	(25,424)	0.072	(23,717)	
November	594,280	474,604	0.58	156,120	172,068	0.54	166,048	0.53
	(33,388)	(25,867)	<0.001	(22,728)	(23,943)	0.631	(20,773)	
December	702,091	524,787	0.52	150,392	143,969	0.54	137,782	0.53
	(35,173)	(38,123)	<0.001	(20,855)	(20,739)	0.826	(19,024)	
Winter	906,657	729,022	0.65	203,858	192,619	0.56	210,364	0.64
	(55,609)	(44,240)	0.012	(37,301)	(34,357)	0.826	(26,680)	
Spring	837,036	585,659	0.57	137,563	177,495	0.80	189,301	0.82
	(58,976)	(33,379)	<0.001	(17,600)	(37,516)	0.337	(37,470)	
Summer	716,676	255,992	0.24	89,066	152,747	0.97	141,118	0.94
	(57,850)	(28,627)	<0.001	(14,251)	(21,784)	0.014	(20,697)	



**Table 2.5.** Box plot statistics for median latitude (and interquartile range) for each season, subpopulation, and decade of polar bears tracked by use of satellite telemetry in BB and KB during the 1990s and 2000s. See Table 2.3 for sample sizes. In the case of BB 2000s, the resident bears in Melville Bay glacial fronts were not included

	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>t statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p value</b>
<b>Winter</b>						
BB 90s	66.90	68.88	72.13	-17.34	1683.4	p<0.001
BB 00s	69.76	72.01	74.90			
KB 90s	77.28	78.62	79.17	-1.86	173.54	p=0.07
KB 00s all	77.03	78.96	79.41			
<b>Spring</b>						
BB 90s	67.99	70.87	73.51	-18.18	1615.99	p<0.001
BB 00s	70.88	72.90	74.48			
KB 90s	77.63	77.91	79.13	-4.06	617.76	p<0.001
KB 00s all	77.25	79.06	79.42			
<b>Summer</b>						
BB 90s	67.26	70.29	72.96	-4.20	1758.07	p<0.001
BB 00s	69.51	70.68	71.60			
KB 90s	77.77	77.89	78.50	-5.47	840.41	p<0.001
KB 00s all	77.27	78.89	79.43			

**Table 2.6.** Movements of all polar bears (AF + AM) captured and tracked in the 1990s and 2000s from BB and KB. Movement to another subpopulation is enumerated if the bear departed for any length of time (4 days or greater).

Time period	Subpopulation of origin	n	Movement to other subpopulation during tracking period				
			Arctic Basin	Baffin Bay	Davis Strait	Kane Basin	Lancaster Sound
1990s	BB	43	0	0	14	0	12
2000s	BB	91	0	0	3	5	3
1990s	KB	12	1	1	0	0	0
2000s	KB	34	2	2	0	0	3

**Table 2.7.** Summary of observed and expected departures from region of origin (capture site) to any other subpopulation region in the 1990s and 2000s for AF polar bears for departures on all time steps. Log rank test of equality conducted on each subpopulation comparing decades.

<b>Subpopulation</b>		<b>Observed</b>	<b>Expected</b>		
<b>Decade</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>departures</b>	<b>departures</b>	<b>(O-E)^2/E</b>	<b>(O-E)^2/V</b>
BB 1990s	43	26	15.7	6.72	12.1
BB 2000s	38	11	21.3	4.96	12.1
KB 1990s	12	2	3.29	0.509	0.871
KB 2000s	20	6	4.71	0.356	0.871

BB:  $\chi^2 = 12.1$ , df = 1, p = 0.000515

KB:  $\chi^2 = 0.9$ , df = 1, p = 0.351

**Table 2.8.** Timing of departures from Baffin Bay in the 1990s and 2000s for radio-collared adult female polar bears for departures of all time steps. Data are reported as number of AF bears departing to another subpopulation for the 1990s (with number of AF bears in 2000s in parentheses).

<b>Month of departure</b>			
<b>from BB</b>	<b>Davis Strait</b>	<b>Lancaster Sound</b>	<b>Kane Basin</b>
1	1 (0)	1 (0)	0 (3)
2	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
3	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
4	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
5	0 (0)	1 (1)	0 (0)
6	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (0)
7	1 (0)	2 (0)	0 (1)
8	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
9	0 (0)	3 (0)	0 (0)
10	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (0)
11	7 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
12	4 (2)	0 (0)	0 (1)

**Table 2.9.** Number of subpopulation boundary crossings made by individual AF bears in each subpopulation and decade for departures of all time steps.

Number of subpopulation boundary crossings by individual AFs													
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
BB 90s	17	3	7	1	3	1	3	0	3	3	1	0	1
BB 00s	27	3	4	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
KB 90s	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
KB 00s	14	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

**Table 2.10.** Movements of AF polar bears captured and tracked in the 1990s and 2000s from BB and KB. Movement to another subpopulation is enumerated if the bear departed for of >30 days or more.

Time period	Subpopulation of origin	n	Movement to other subpopulation during tracking period				
			Arctic Basin	Baffin Bay	Davis Strait	Kane Basin	Lancaster Sound
1990s	BB	43	0	0	14	0	12
2000s	BB	38	0	0	3	5	3
1990s	KB	12	1	1	0	0	0
2000s	KB	20	2	1	0	0	3

**Table 2.11.** Summary of observed and expected departures from region of origin (capture site) to any other subpopulation region in the 1990s and 2000s for radio-collared adult female polar bears for departures of >30 days or more. Log rank test of equality conducted on each subpopulation comparing decades.

Subpopulation		Observed	Expected		
Decade	N	departures	departures	(O-E)^2/E	(O-E)^2/V
BB 1990s	43	19	12.4	3.580	6.760
BB 2000s	38	8	14.6	3.020	6.760
KB 1990s	12	1	2.06	0.532	0.914
KB 2000s	29	4	2.96	0.367	0.914

BB:  $\chi^2 = 6.8$ , df = 1, p = 0.009

KB:  $\chi^2 = 0.9$ , df = 1, p = 0.339

**Table 2.12.** Timing of departures from Baffin Bay in the 1990s and 2000s for radio-collared AF polar bears for departures of >30 days or more. Data are reported as number of AF bears departing to another subpopulation for the 1990s (number of AF bears departing in 2000s in parentheses).

<b>Month of departure</b>			
<b>from BB</b>	<b>Davis Strait</b>	<b>Lancaster Sound</b>	<b>Kane Basin</b>
1	1 (0)	1 (0)	0 (3)
2	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
3	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
4	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
5	0 (0)	1 (1)	0 (0)
6	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (0)
7	1 (0)	2 (0)	0 (1)
8	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
9	0 (0)	3 (0)	0 (0)
10	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (0)
11	7 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
12	4 (2)	0 (0)	0 (1)



**Table 2.13.** Number of subpopulation boundary crossings made by individual radio-collared adult female bears in each subpopulation and decade for departures of >30 days or more. 0 denotes the number of bears that never cross a boundary, so n=24 bears in BB 90s never departed from BB. Percentages shown as percent of total tagged bears.

Number of subpopulation boundary crossings by individual AFs								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BB 90s	24 (56%)	8 (19%)	6 (14%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
BB 00s	30 (79%)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)	0	1 (3%)	1(3%)	0	1(3%)
KB 90s	11 (92%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (8%)
KB 00s	16 (80%)	1 (5%)	0	1 (5%)	1(5%)	0	1(5%)	0

**Table 2.14.** Number and subpopulation location of harvest recoveries of bears marked genetically between 2011 and 2014. Data presented as number of individuals.

<b>Subpopulation</b>		<b>Subpopulation Recovered<sup>1</sup></b>					
<b>Marked</b>	<b>BB</b>	<b>KB</b>	<b>LS</b>	<b>FB</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>NW</b>	<b>GB</b>
BB	84	0	0	0	1	0	0
KB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

<sup>1</sup> BB, Baffin Bay; KB, Kane Basin; LS, Lancaster Sound; FB, Foxe Basin; DS, Davis Strait; NW, Norwegian Bay; GB, Gulf of Boothia

**Table 2.15.** Recaptures of bears marked genetically between 2011 and 2014 in BB and KB. Data presented as number of recapture events. Some individuals were recaptured more than once. Excludes multiple recaptures of same individual within a season. Also includes COY that were not initially sampled but later seen as yearlings with mother and sampled.

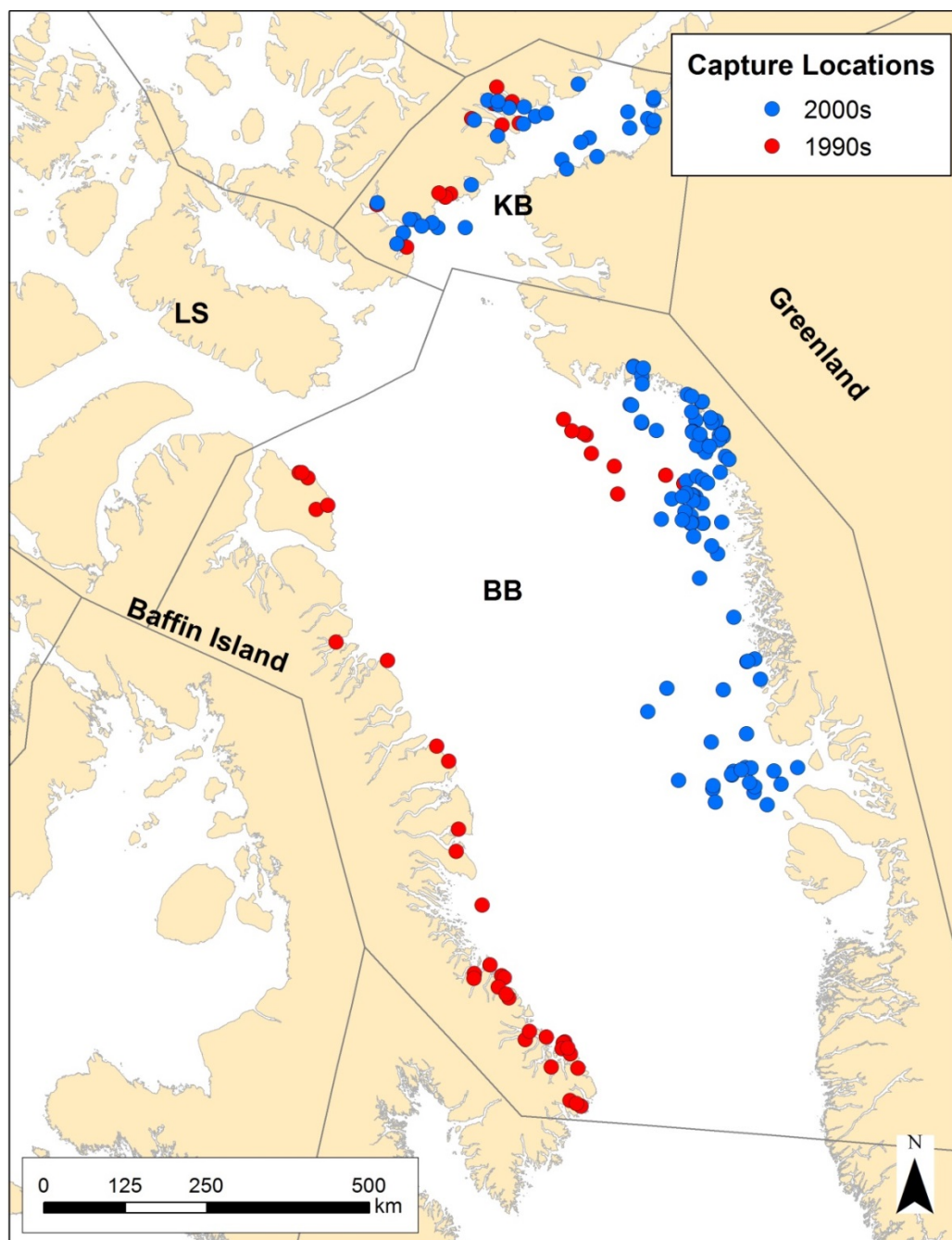
<b>Subpopulation Marked<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Subpopulation Recaptured</b>	
	<b>BB</b>	<b>KB</b>
BB	206	1
KB	1	28

<sup>1</sup> BB, Baffin Bay; KB, Kane Basin

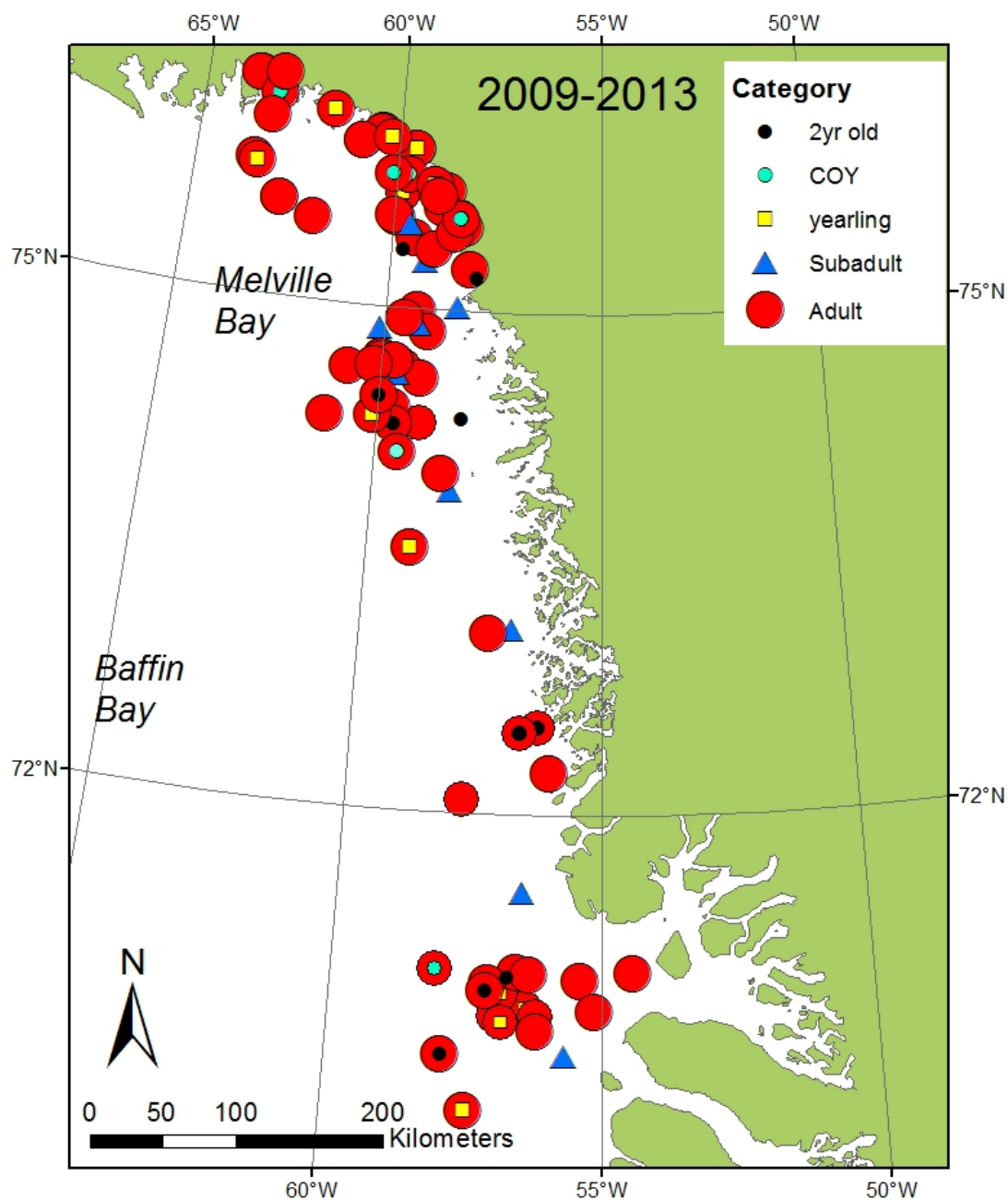
**Table 2.16.** Recoveries of polar bears tagged in Baffin Bay (1990-1997) in the harvest in Canada and Greenland, 1990 to 2014.

<b>Sex of Bear</b>	<b>Recovered in Harvest (1990-2014)</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>In Baffin Bay</b>	<b>Outside Baffin Bay</b>	
Female	53	7	60
Male	98	23	121

**Figure 2.1.** Distribution of capture locations of polar bears with satellite collars in BB and KB during the 1990s and the 2000s, respectively. See Table 2.2 for sample sizes. Note in 1990s bears in BB were mainly captured on Baffin Island in fall (12 were captured on sea ice in spring; 3 along Baffin Island and 9 in NW Greenland) whereas during the 2000s all bears were captured and tagged with satellite transmitters on the sea ice in NW Greenland in spring.

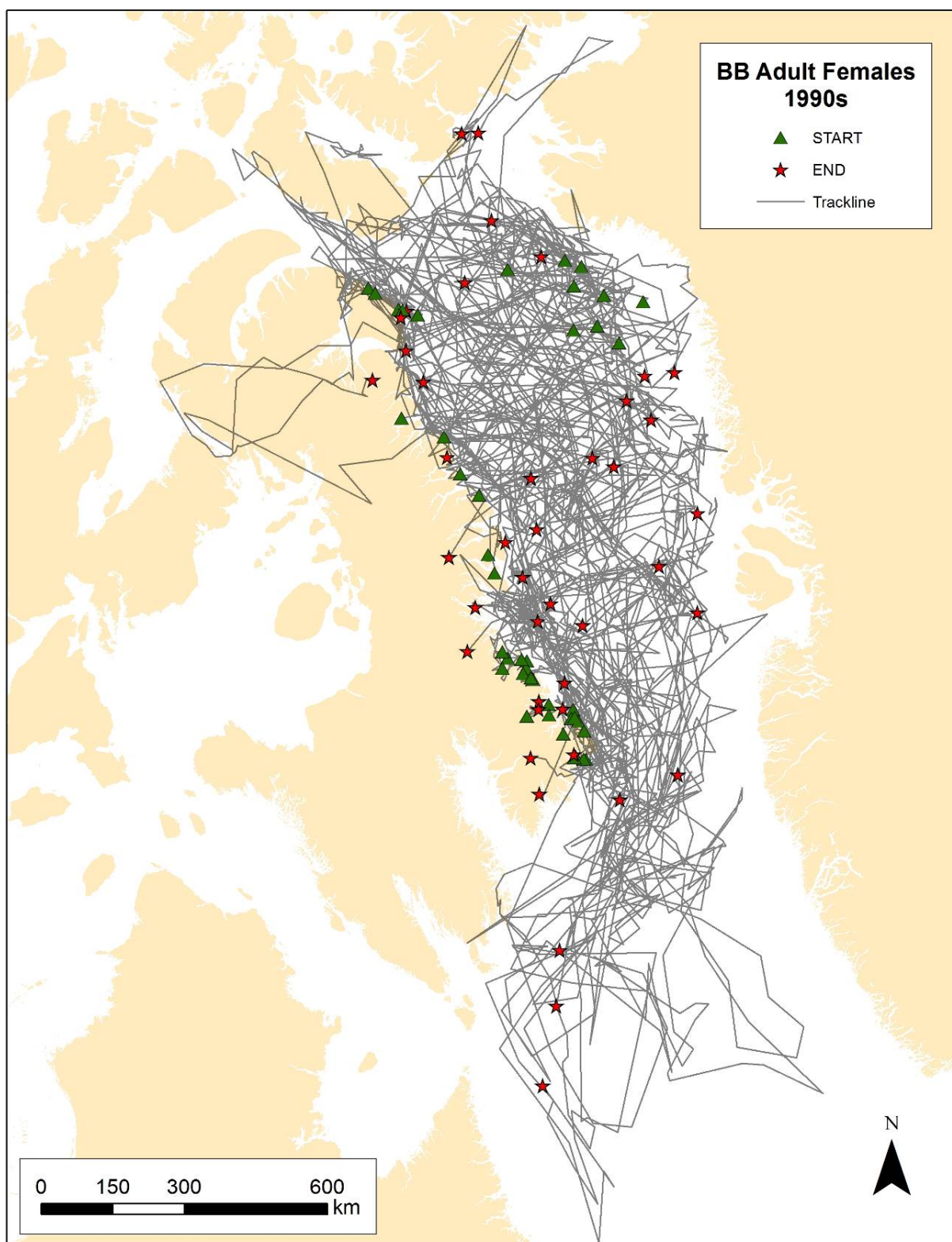


**Figure 2.2.** Distribution of ages and family groups of a total of 139 individual polar bears captured in spring in northwest Greenland, 2009-2013.



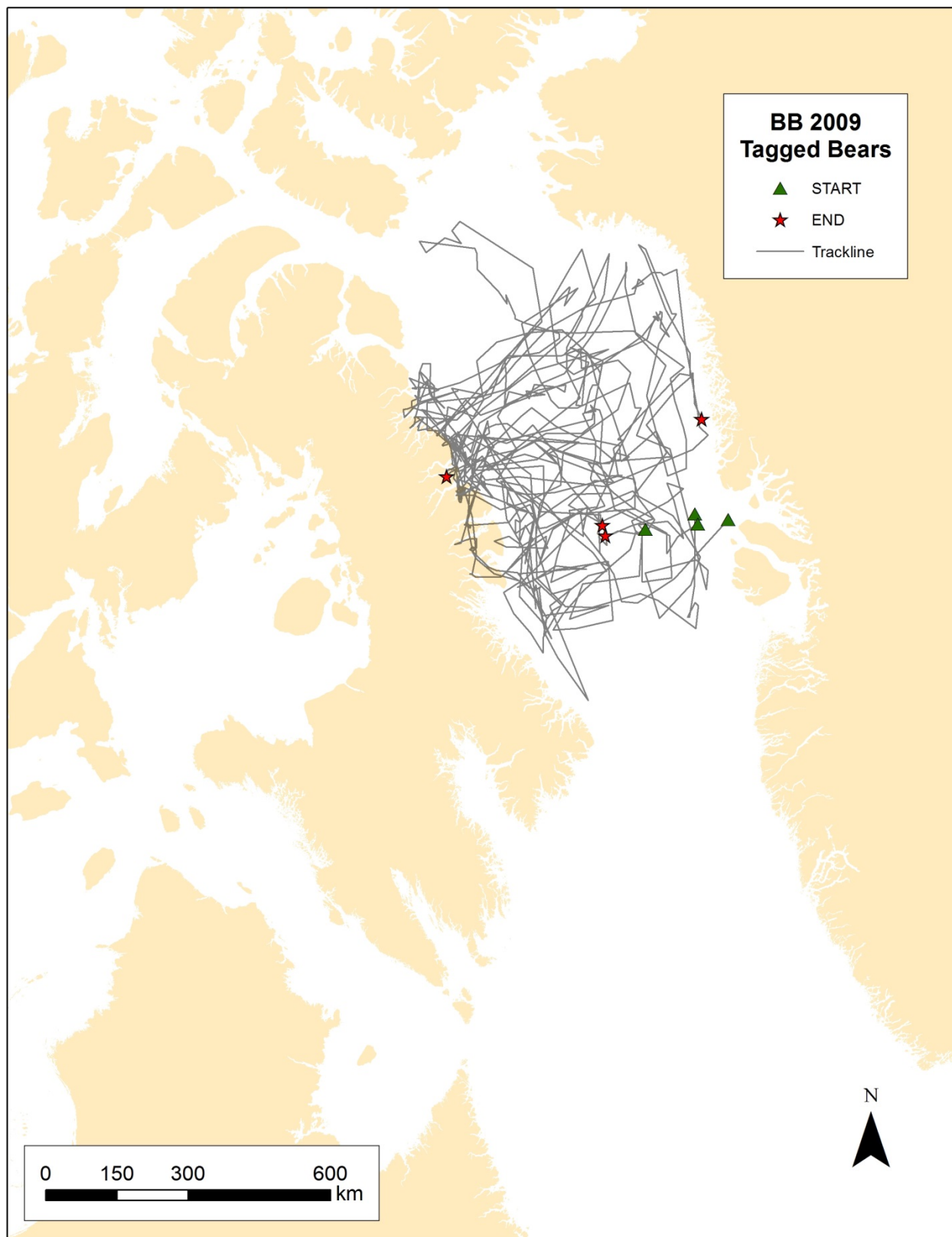
**Figure 2.3.** Tracklines from n=43 adult female polar bears satellite collared in the 1990s in BB.

Note the general absence of tracks on the fast ice in West and Northwest Greenland.



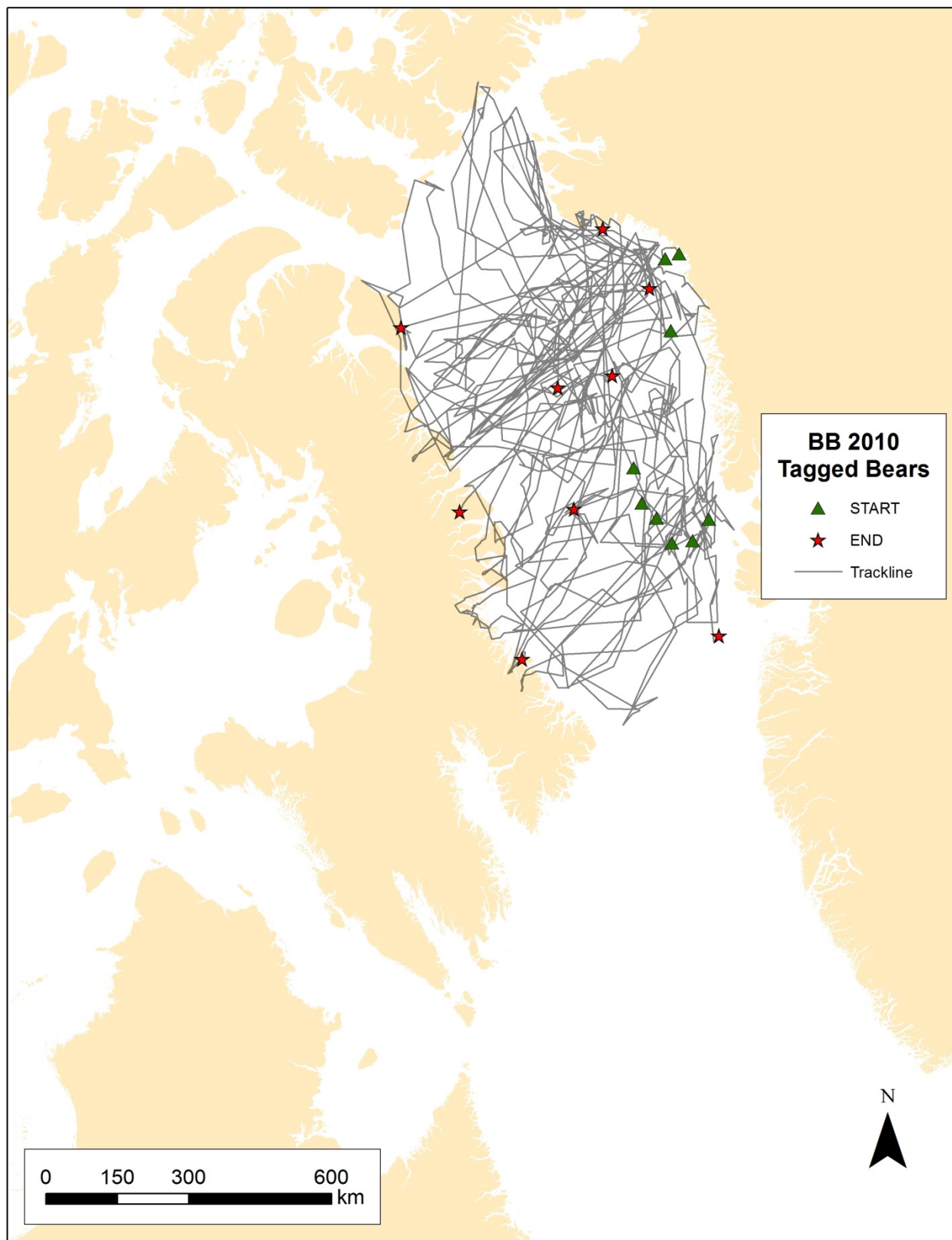


**Figure 2.4.** Tracklines from n=5 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2009 in BB.

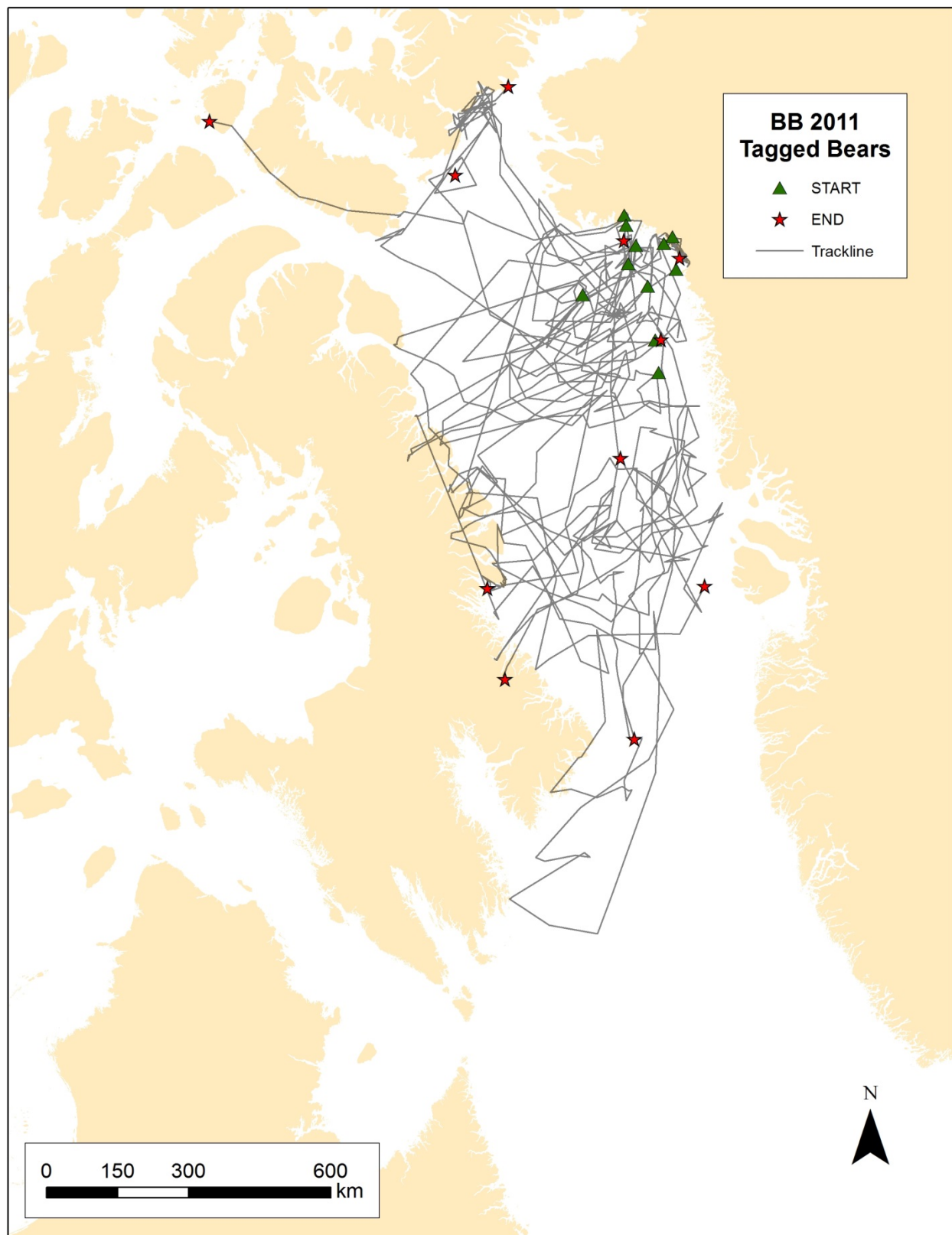




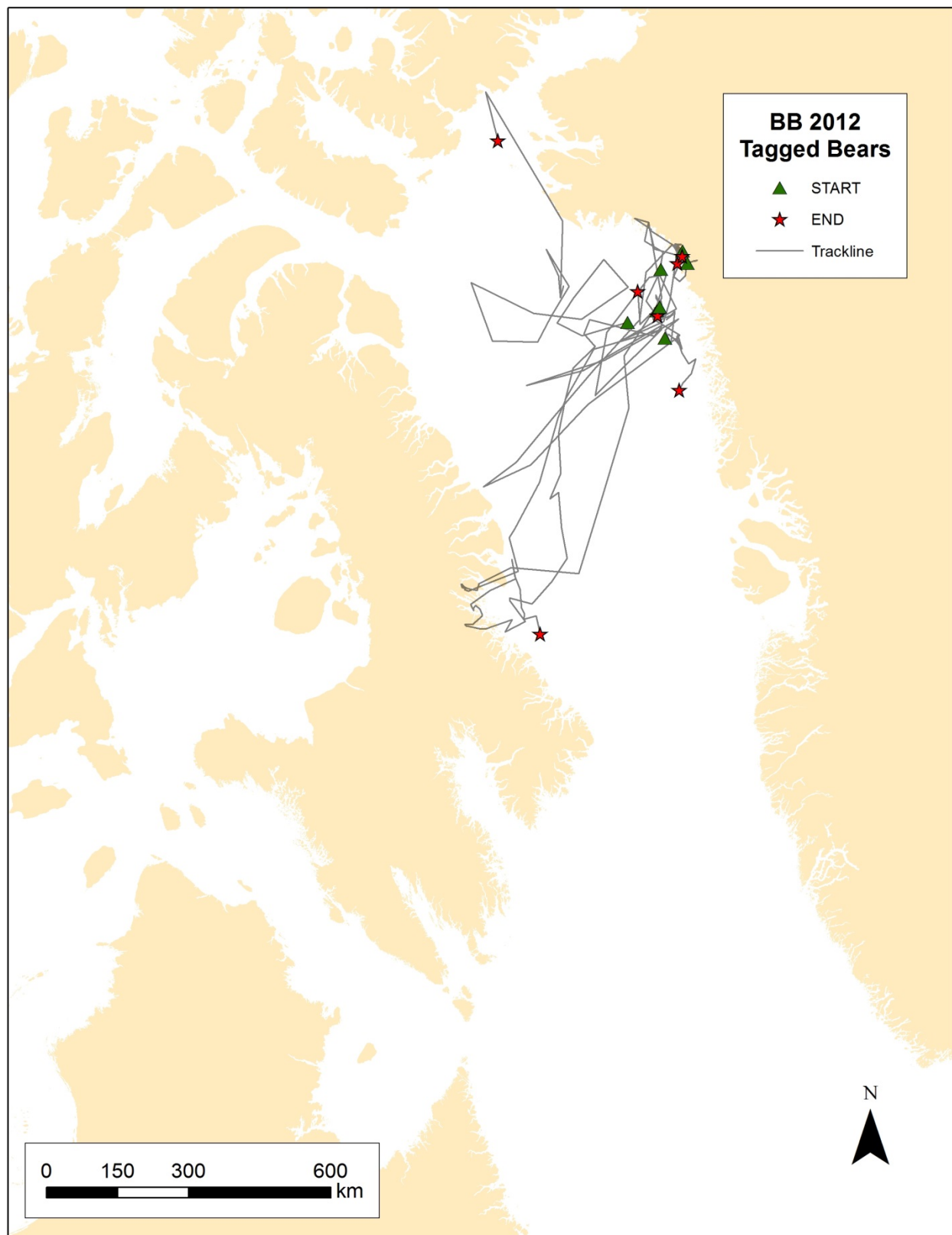
**Figure 2.5.** Tracklines from n=9 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2010 in BB.



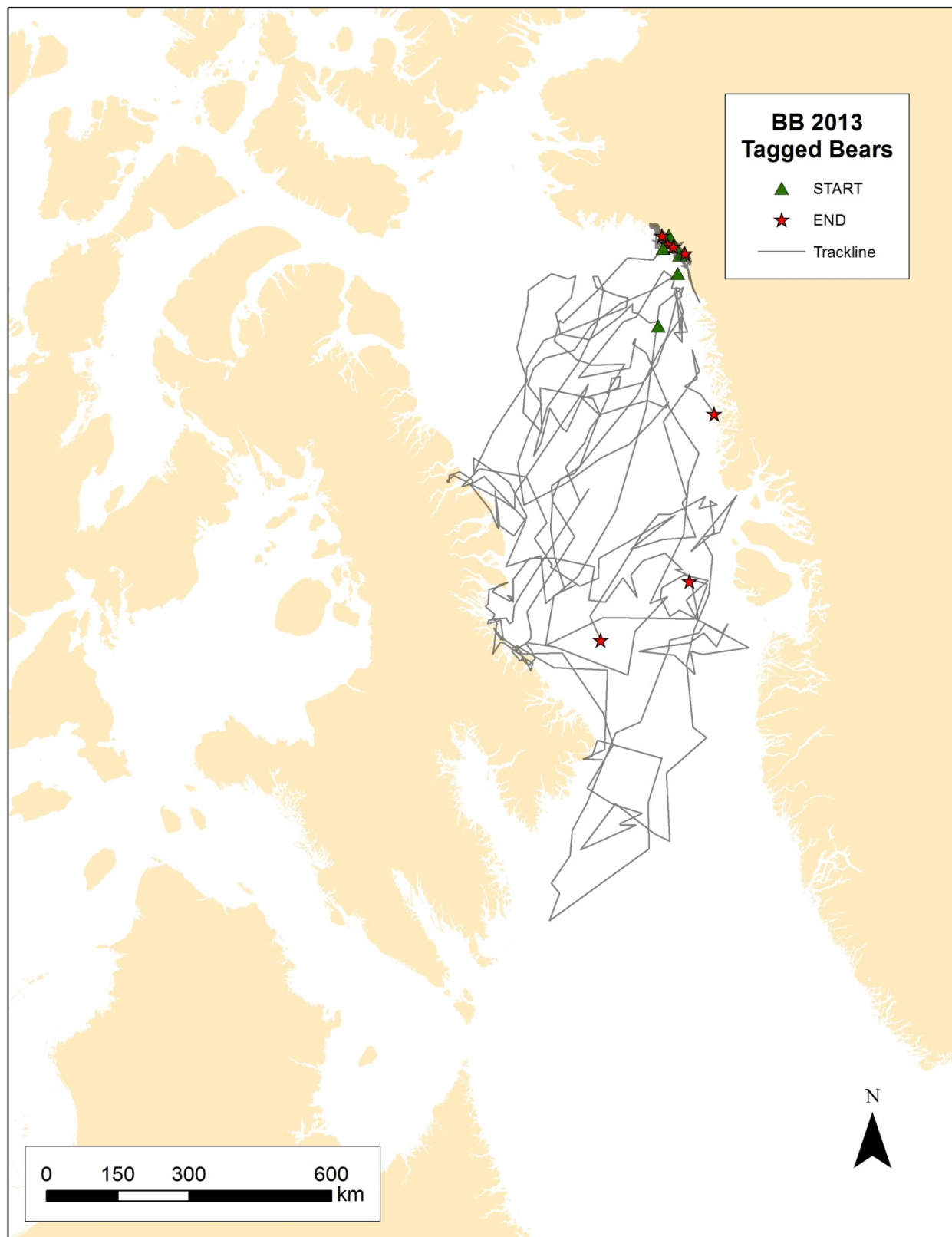
**Figure 2.6.** Tracklines from n=12 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2011 in BB.



**Figure 2.7.** Tracklines from n=11 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2012 in BB.

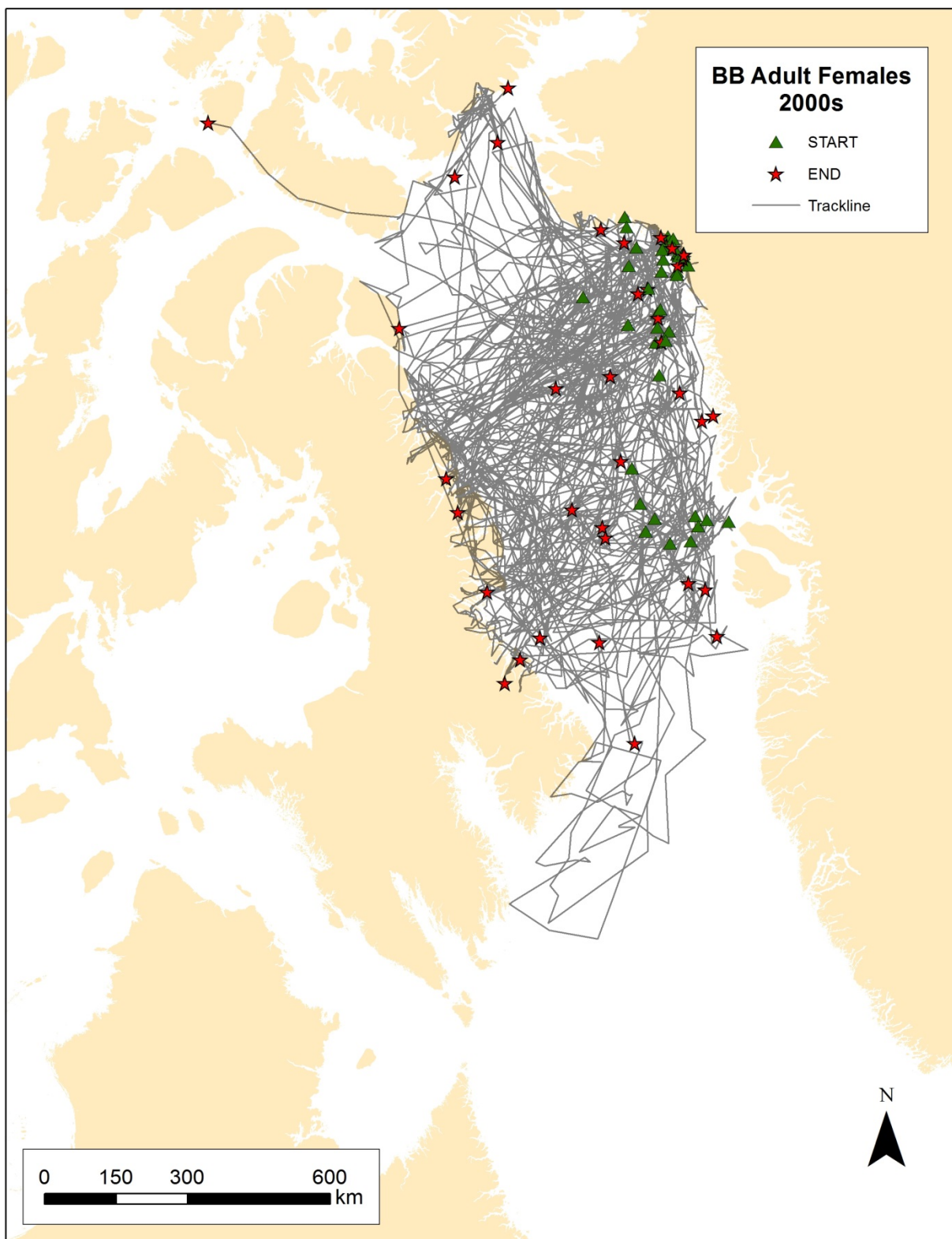


**Figure 2.8.** Tracklines from n=9 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2013 in BB.

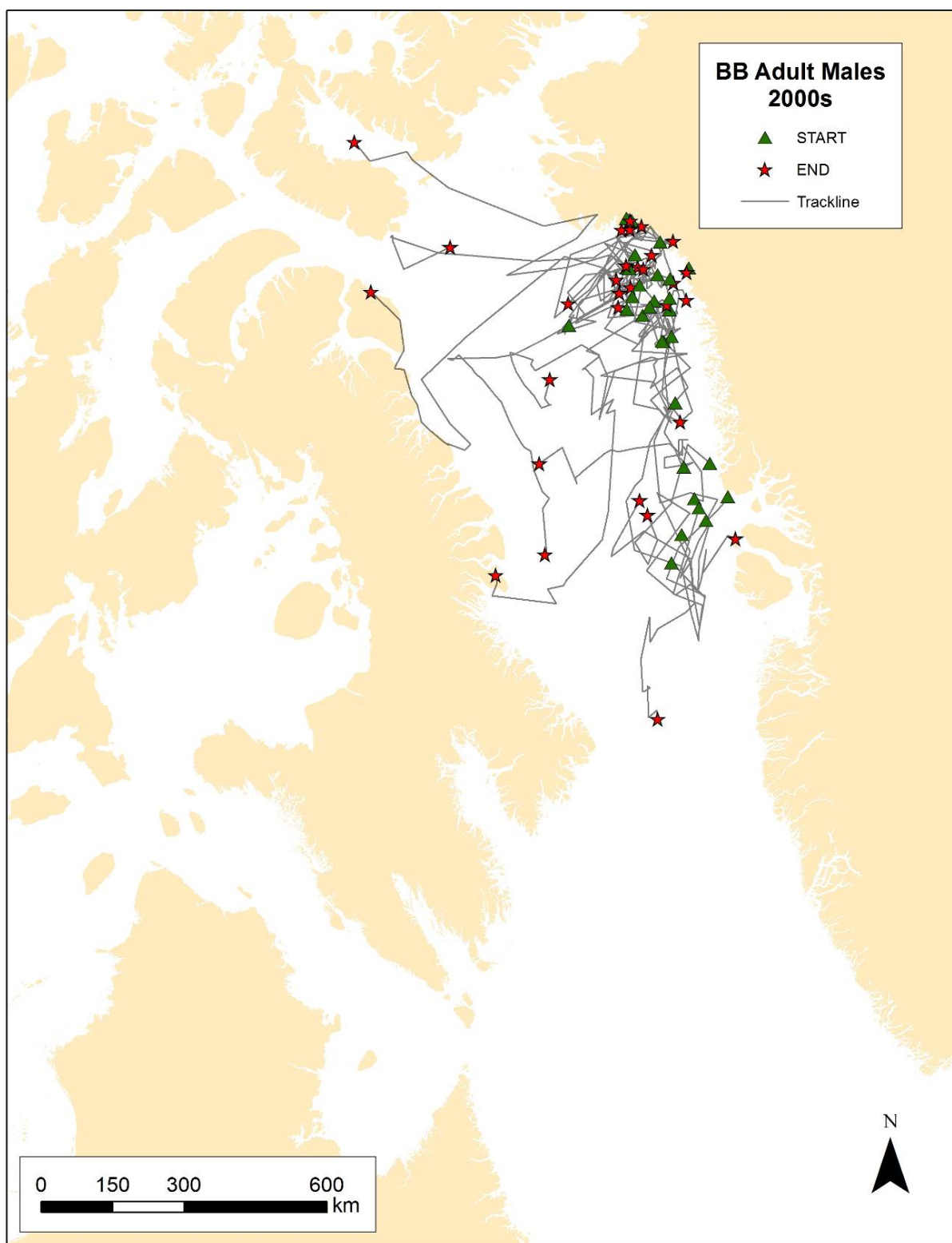




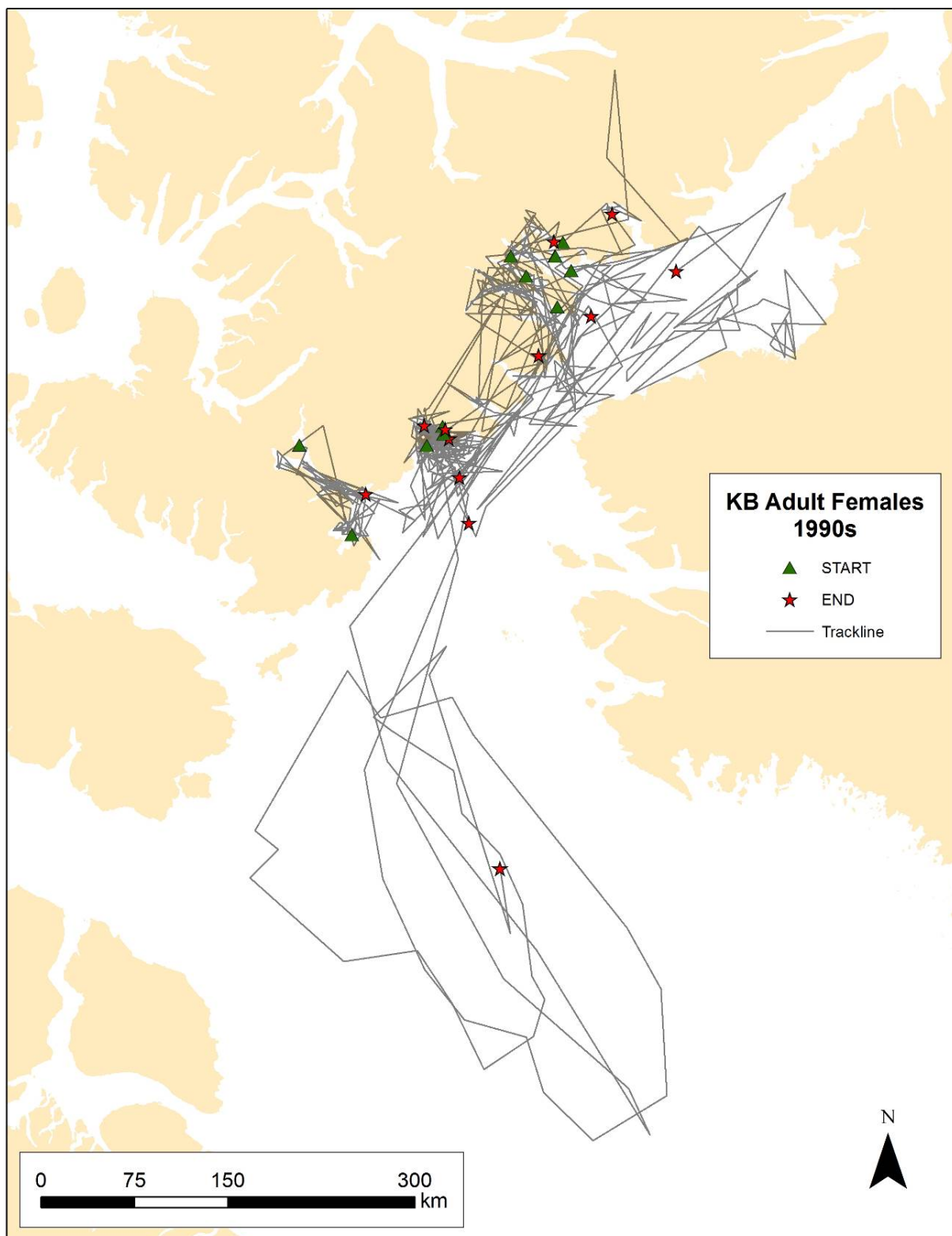
**Figure 2.9.** Tracklines from all adult female bears (n=38) collared between 2009 and 2013 shown together through April 2015, excluding bears where collars failed after a few days.



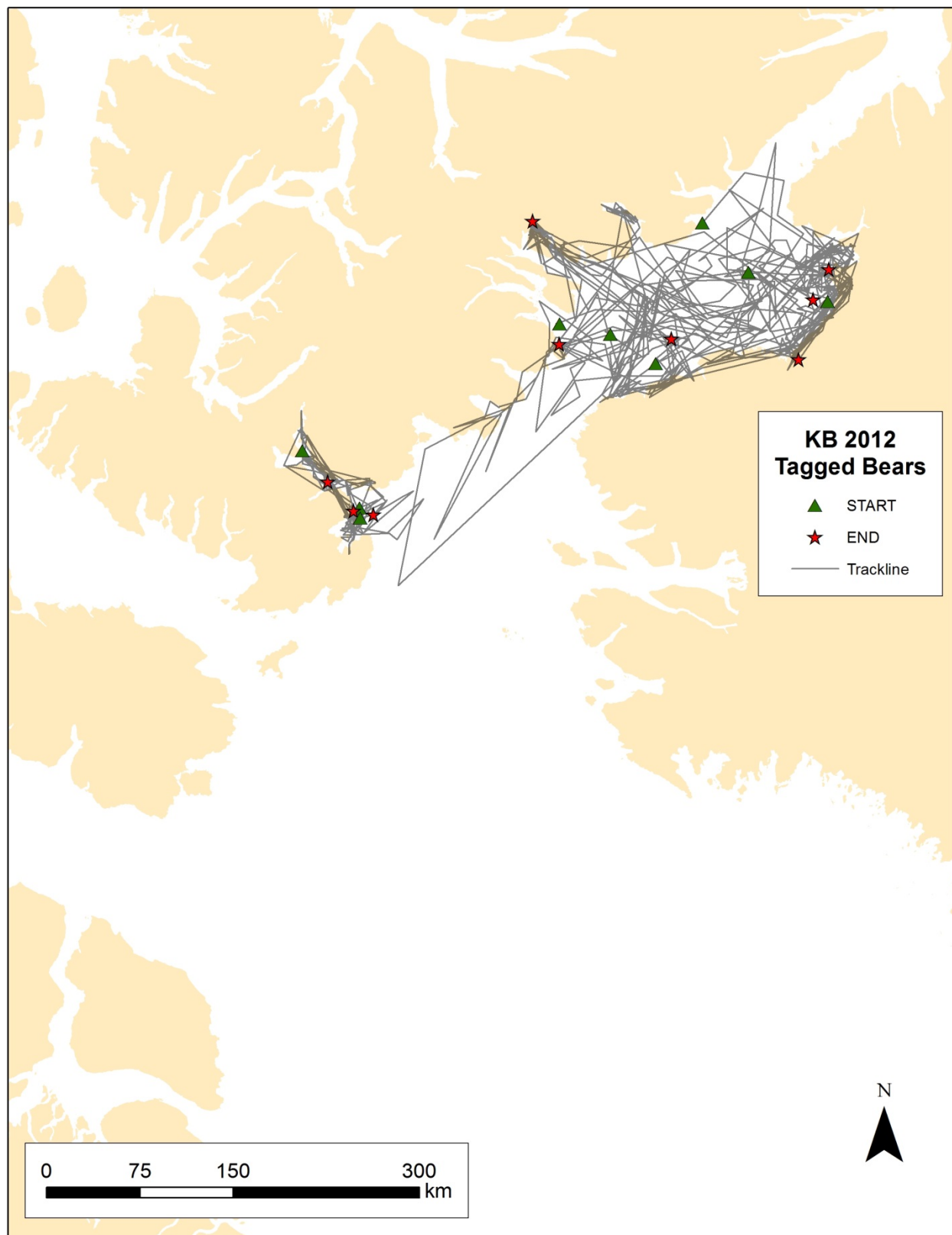
**Figure 2.10.** Tracklines from n=32 adult male bears tagged with ear transmitters between 2009-2013.



**Figure 2.11.** Tracklines from n=12 adult female polar bears satellite collared in the 1990s in KB.

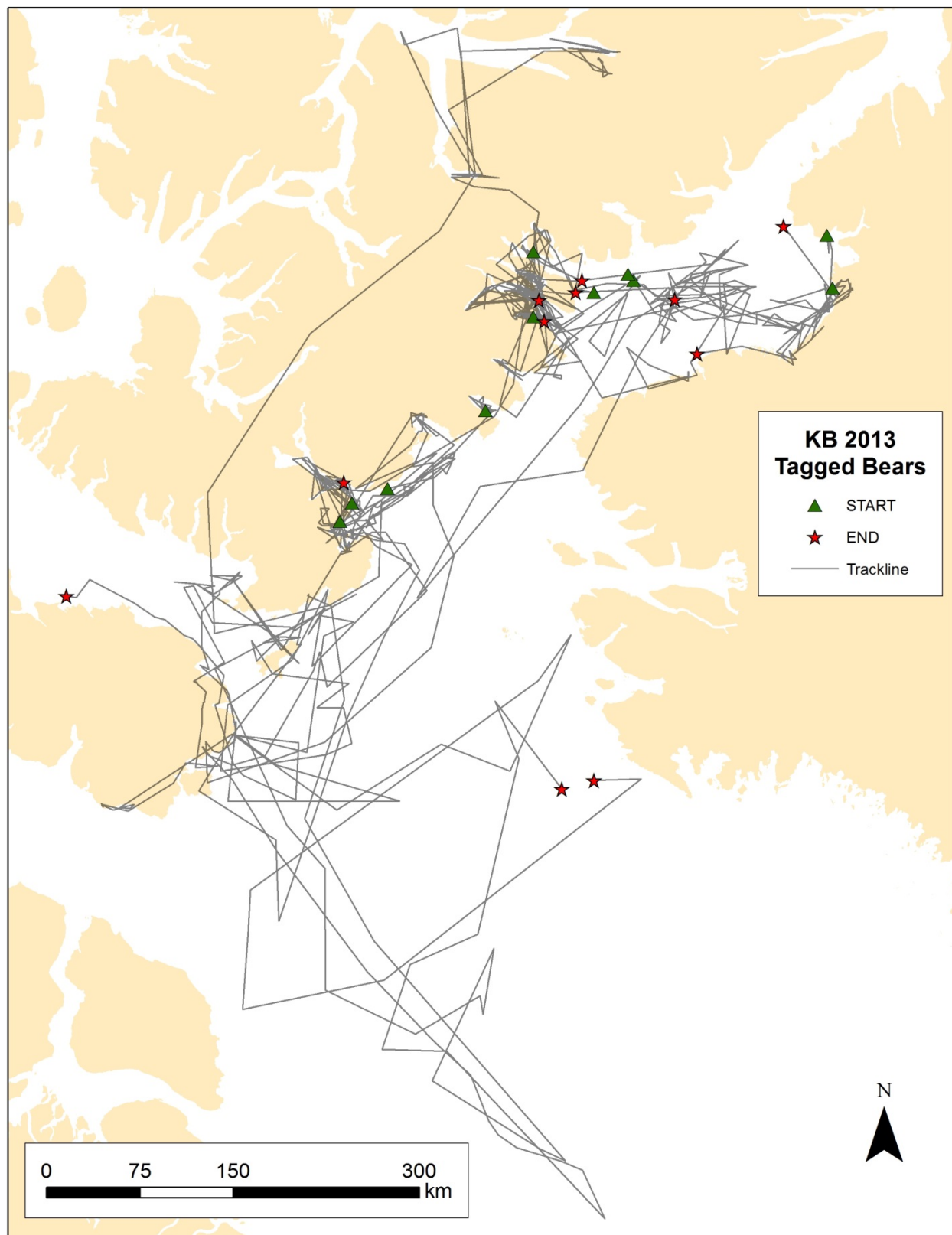


**Figure 2.12.** Tracklines from n=9 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2012 in KB.

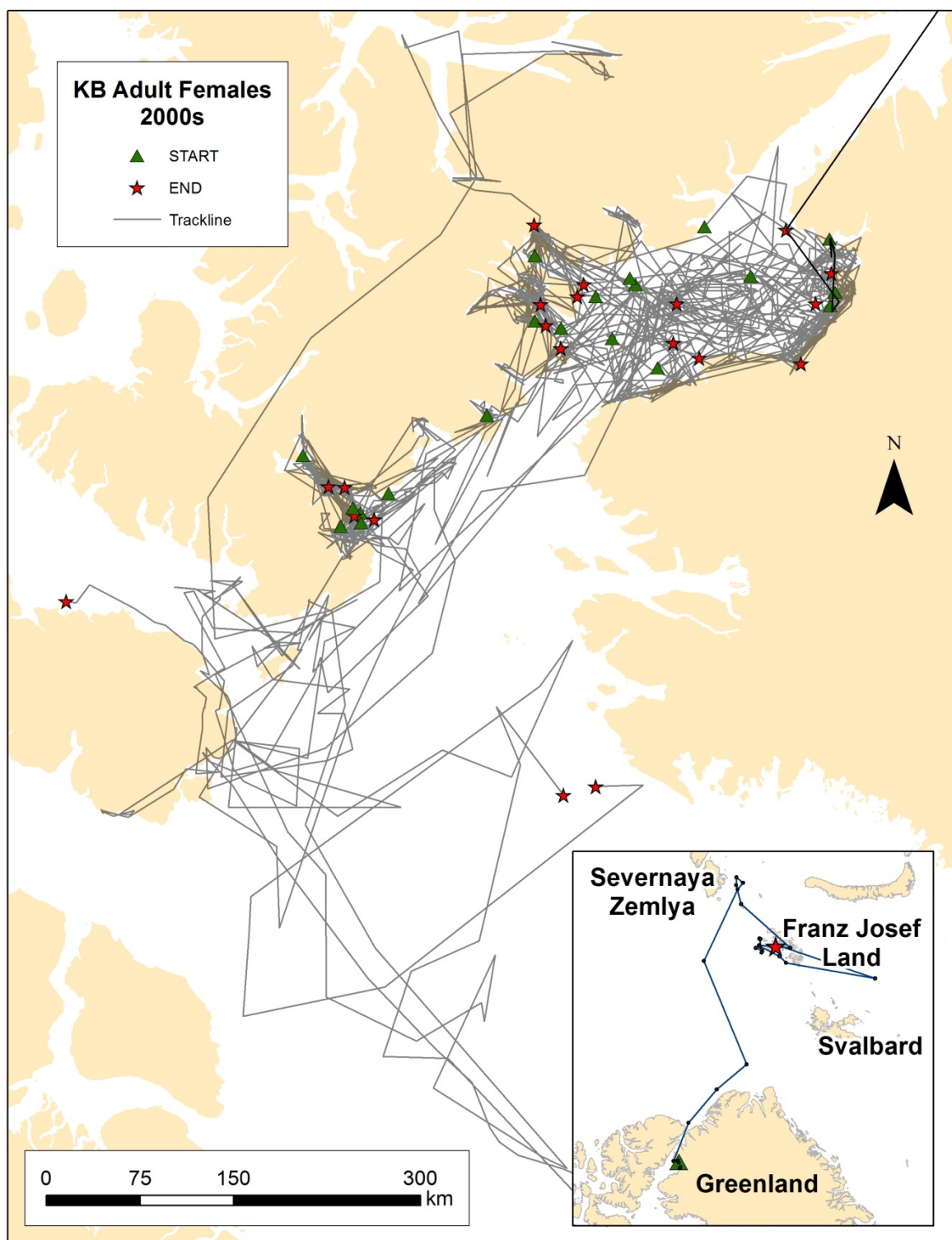




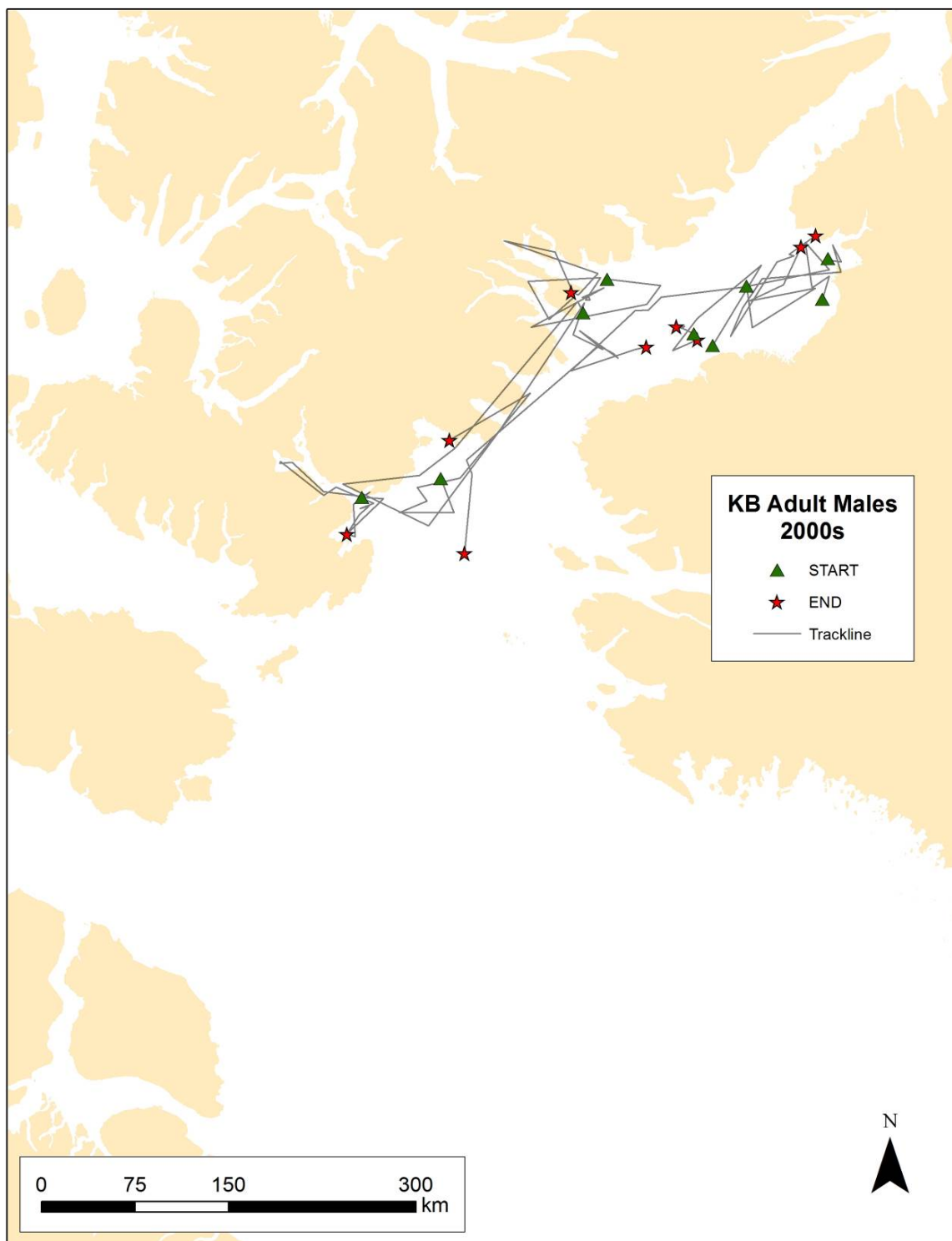
**Figure 2.13.** Tracklines from n=11 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2013 in KB.



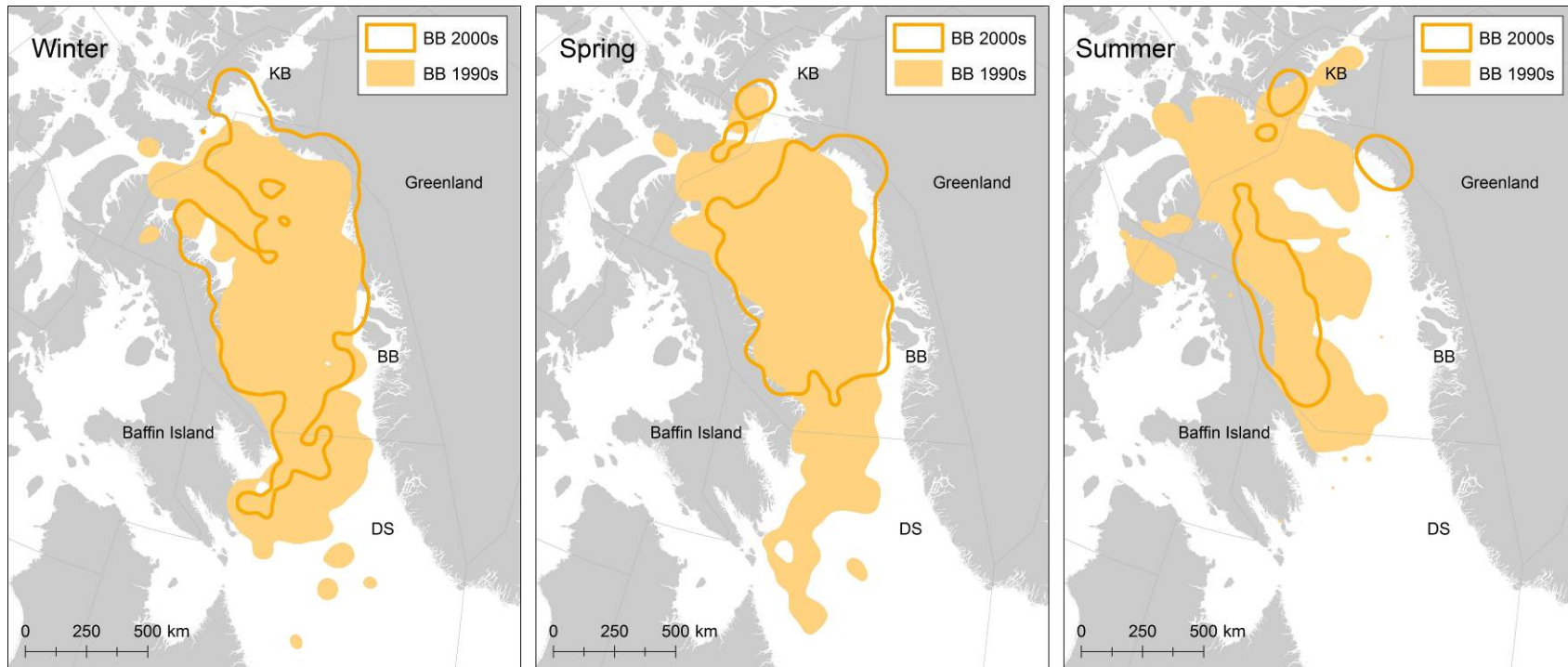
**Figure 2.14.** Tracklines from n=20 adult female polar bears satellite collared in 2012 and 2013 shown through April 2015 in KB. Inset shows n=1 bear that moved to Russia, excluded from analyses.



**Figure 2.15.** Tracklines from n=9 adult male polar bears satellite tagged with ear tags in 2012 and 2013 in KB.



**Figure 2.16.** 95% kernel ranges for bears captured in 1990s and 2000s in BB by season (winter, spring and summer). See Table 2.4 for areas, overlap and tests for significance between decades.

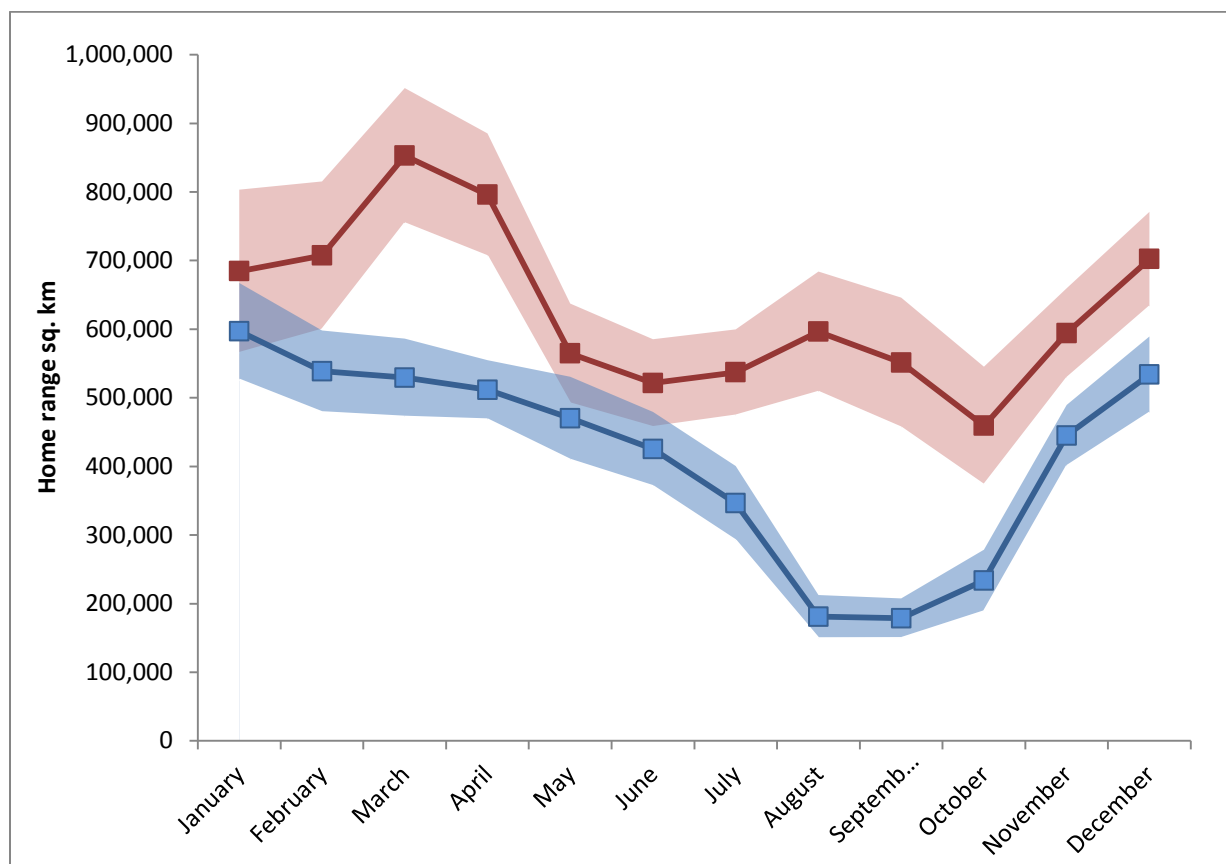




**Figure 2.17.** Matrix of home ranges shown by month in Baffin Bay for collared adult females in the 1990s and 2000s.

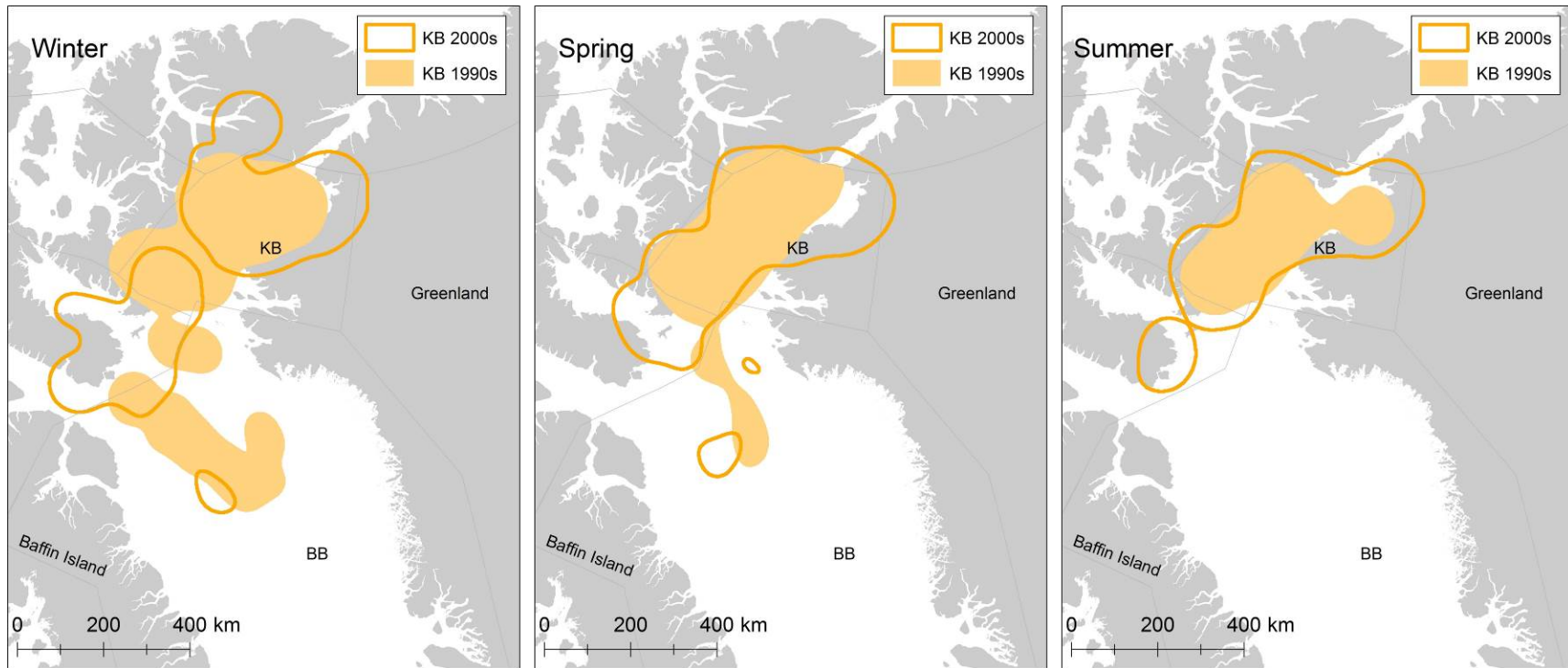


**Figure 2.18.** Home range sizes between decades for adult female polar bears in BB in the 1990s (red, n=43) and 2000s (blue, n=38). Line represents the mean values by month and shaded area  $\pm$  2 SE. Graph excludes Melville Bay resident bears.

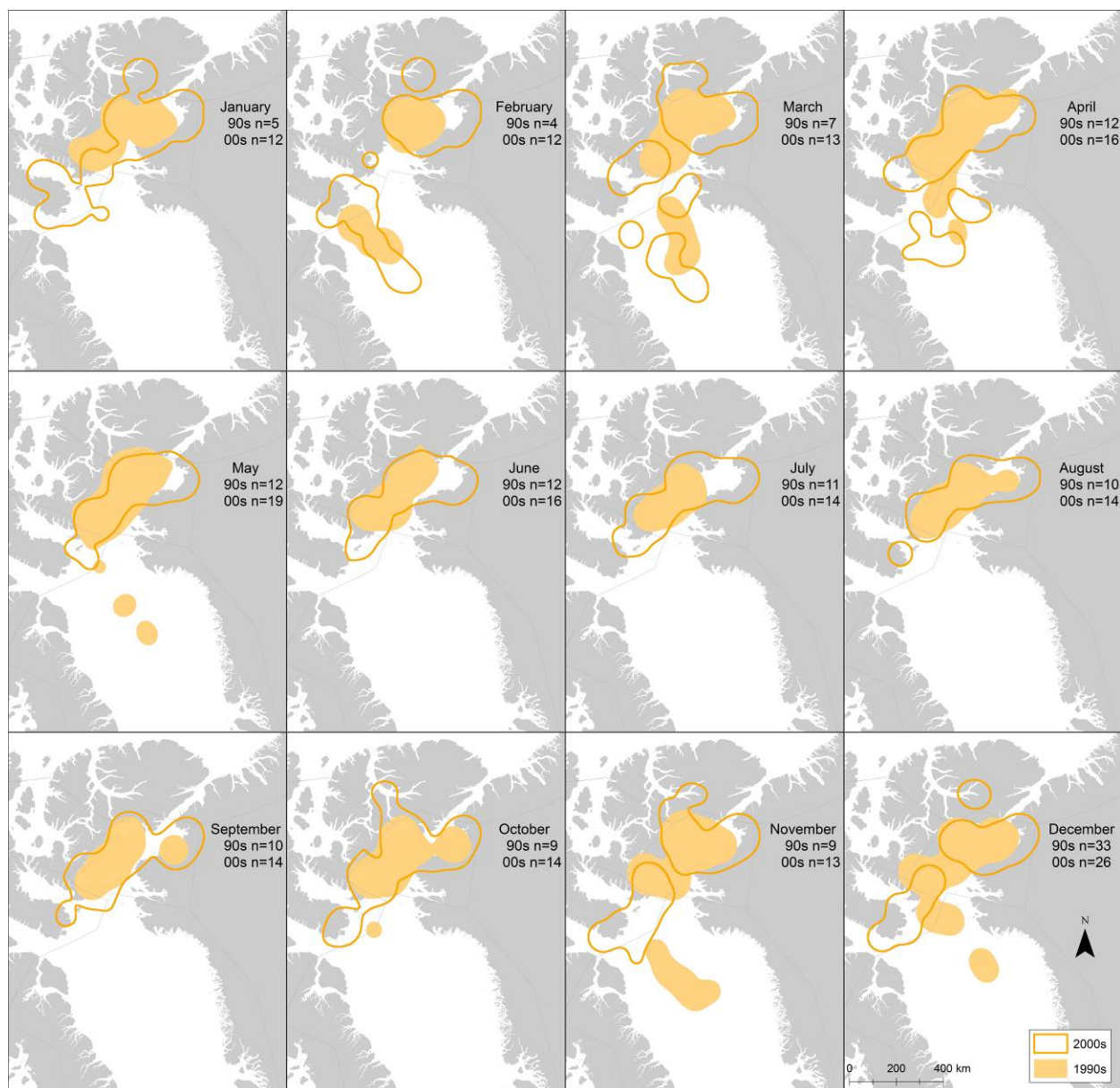


**Figure 2.19.** 95% kernel ranges for adult female bears captured in 1990s and 2000s in KB by season (winter, spring and summer).

See Table 2.4 for areas, overlap and test for significance between decades.

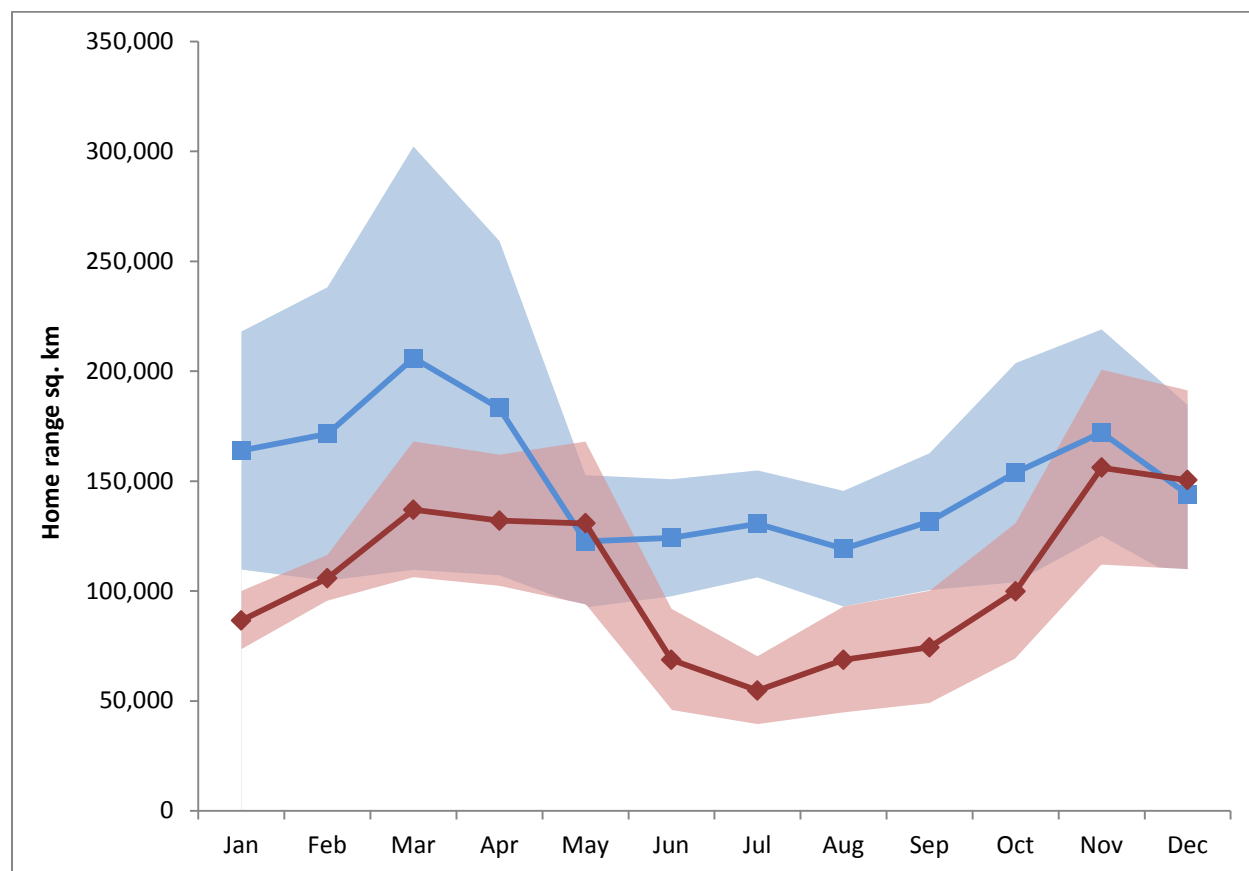


**Figure 2.20.** Matrix of home ranges shown by month for adult female polar bears in Kane Basin in the 1990s and 2000s.

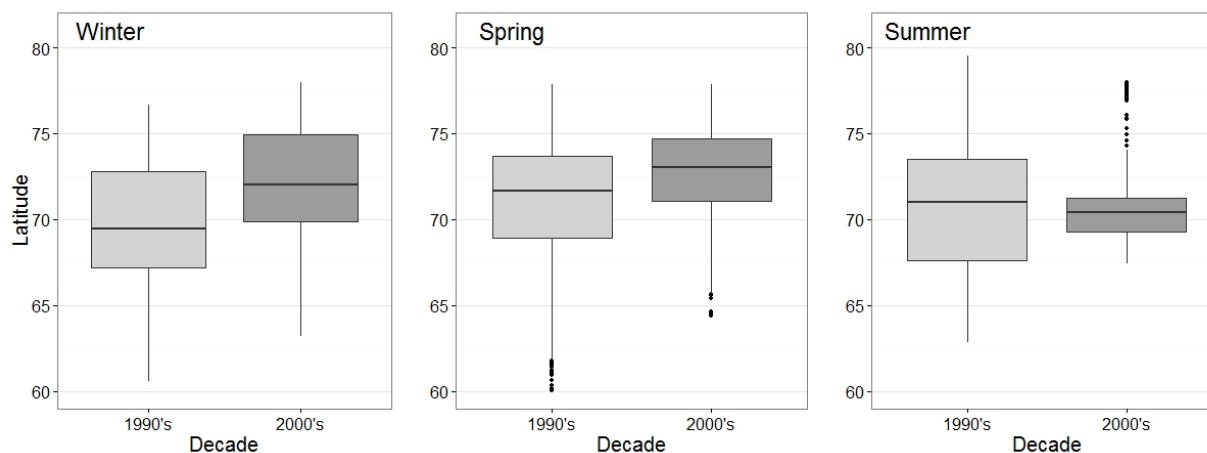




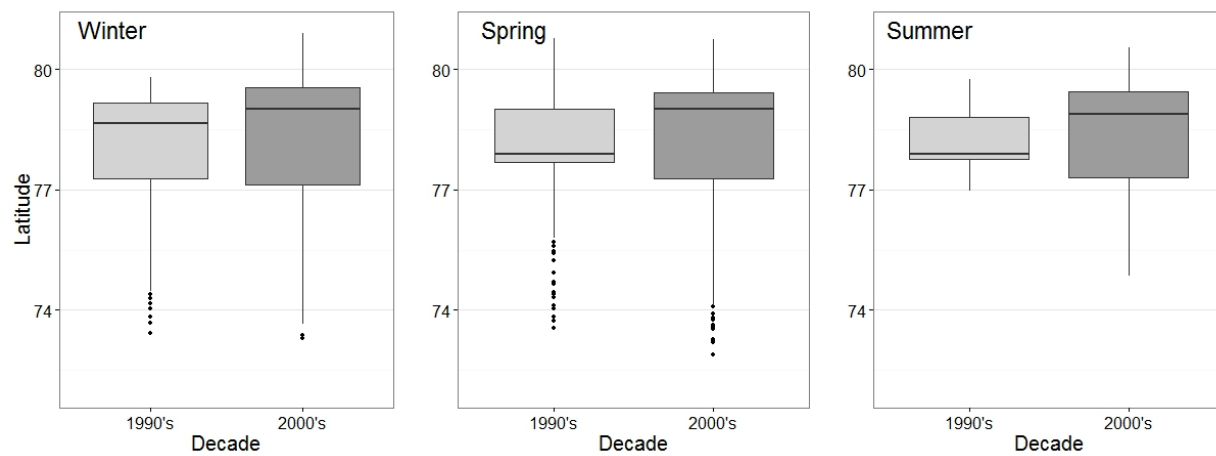
**Figure 2.21.** Home range sizes between decades for adult female polar bears in KB in the 1990s (red, n=12) and 2000s (blue, n=20). Line represents the mean values by month and shaded area  $\pm 2$  SE.



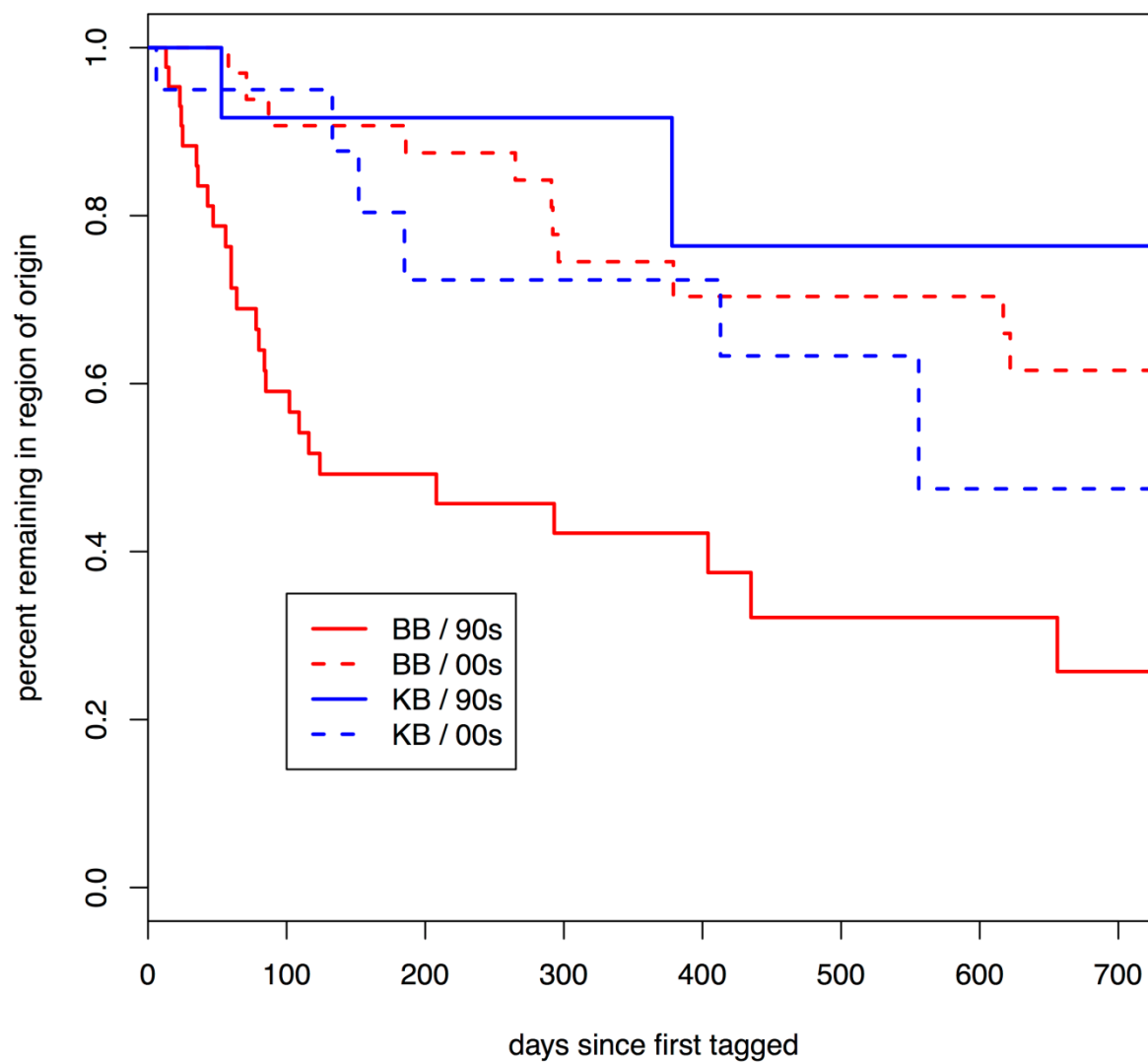
**Figure 2.22.** Box plots shown by season of median latitude for adult female polar bears in BB in the 1990s (n=43) and 2000s (n=38). Plot excludes the bears that are resident in Melville Bay though inclusion of these bears did not change the significance of the results.



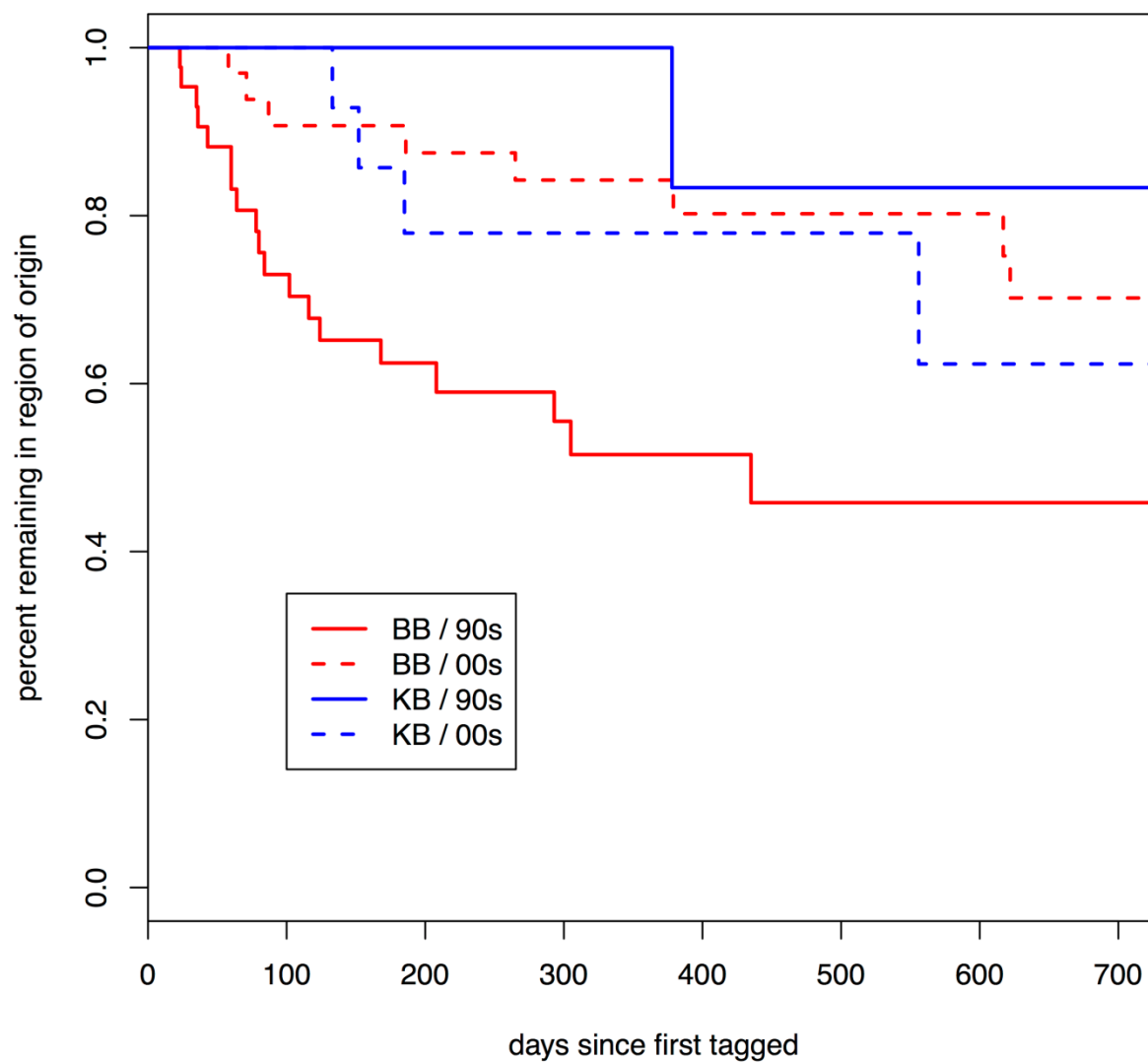
**Figure 2.23.** Box plots by season of median latitude for AF bears in KB in the 1990s (n=12) and 2000s (n=20).



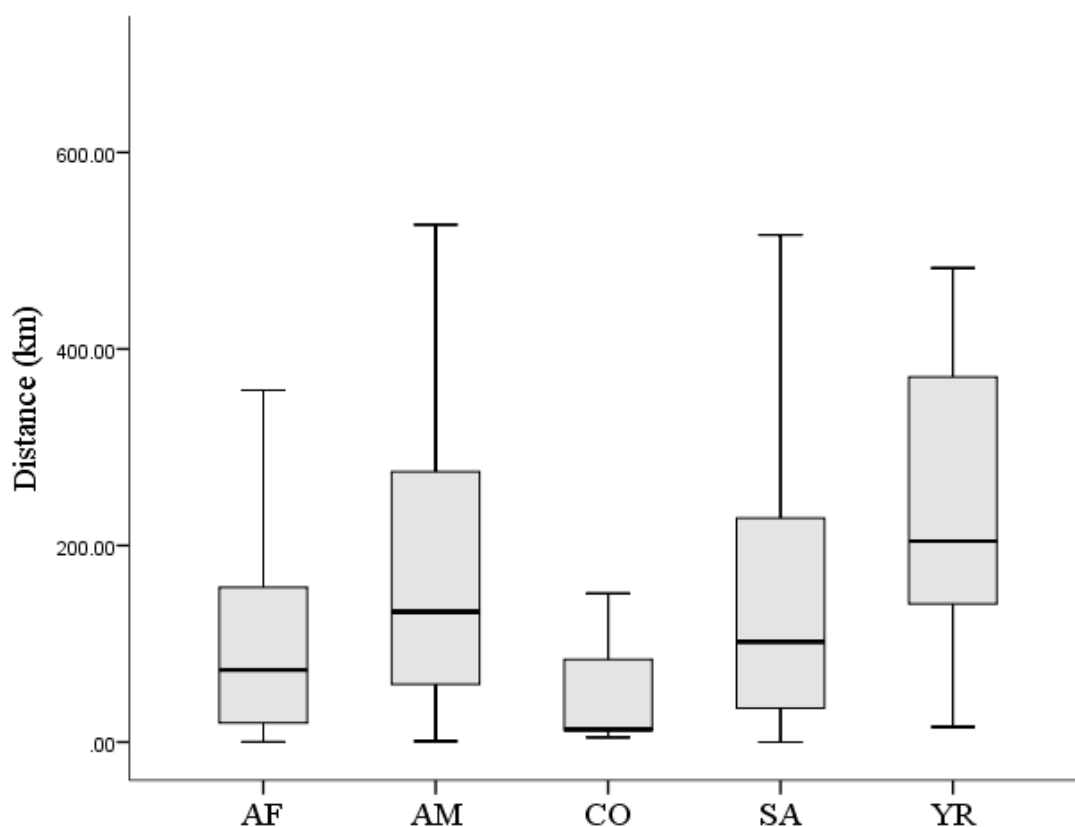
**Figure 2.24.** Plot of departure timing from region of origin for BB and KB bears in the 1990s and 2000s where departures of any length (min 4 days) were considered. See Table 2.3 for sample sizes.



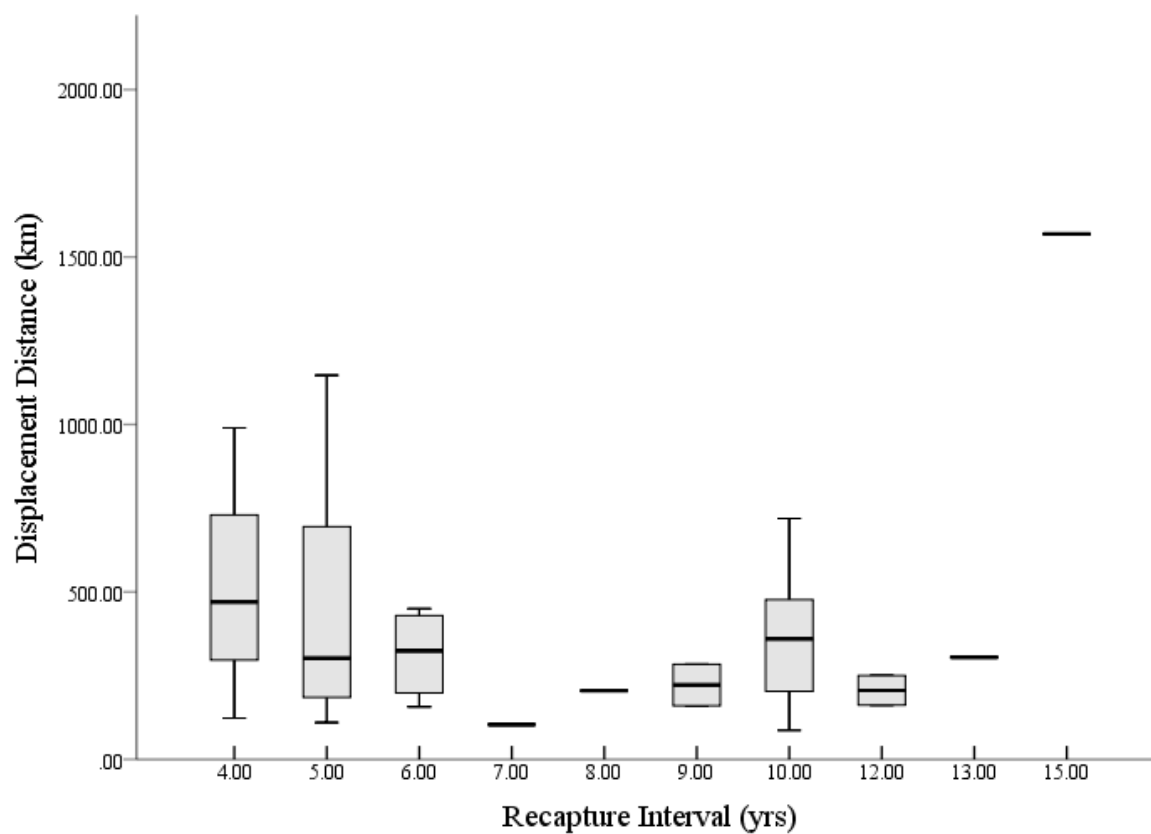
**Figure 2.25.** Plot of departure timing from region of origin for BB and KB bears in the 1990s and 2000s where only departures 30 days or greater were considered. See Table 2.3 for sample sizes.



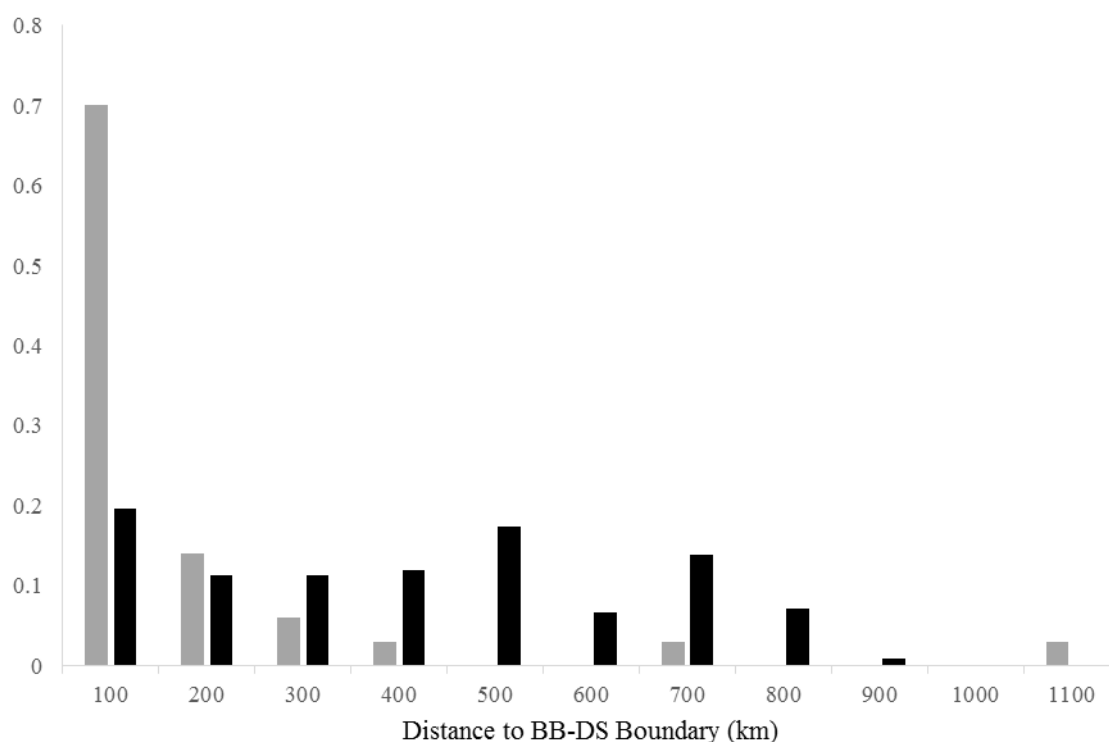
**Figure 2.26.** Distances (km) between mark and recapture locations of polar bears in Baffin Bay, 2011-2013. Adult females (AF), adult males (AM), cub-of-the-year (CO=COY), subadults (SA), yearlings (YR). Median distance is represented by the black line within each box. Box represents the interquartile range. Whiskers represent maximum and minimum values. Symbols denote significant differences between groups (Bonferonni correction for multiple comparisons,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ).



**Figure 2.27.** Relationship between capture-recapture interval and straight line displacement distance for 29 bears that moved between Baffin Bay and Davis Strait as detected by capture and recapture. Median distance is represented by the black line within each box. Box represents the interquartile range. Whiskers represent maximum and minimum values.

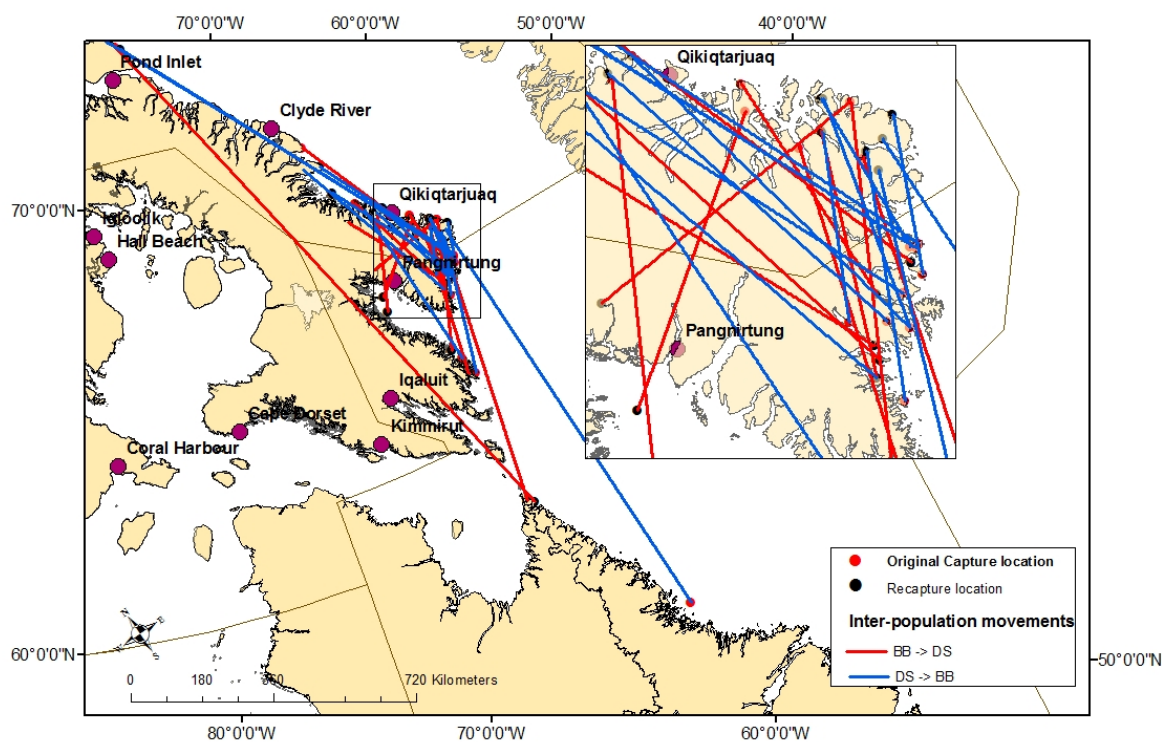


**Figure 2.28.** Frequency distribution of the distance between capture location and the boundary of the Baffin Bay (BB) and Davis Strait (DS) polar bear subpopulations for 29 individuals that made inter-subpopulation movements as detected by capture and recapture (grey bars), 1991-2013. Distances between capture locations and the BB-DS boundary for all bears ( $n = 2,771$ ) marked in BB and DS are also shown (black bars). Bars represent proportion of captures occurring within each distance bin.





**Figure 2.29.** Capture and recapture locations of bears known to have made inter-subpopulation movements between mark-recapture sampling sessions in Baffin Bay (BB) (1990-97), Davis Strait (DS) (2005-07), and Baffin Bay (2009-2013).



## CHAPTER 3

### REASSESSING THE 1990S BAFFIN BAY DATA FOR BIAS AND COMPATIBILITY WITH THE 2010S DATA

#### KEY FINDINGS

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- This chapter evaluates patterns in the 1990s physical MR data, including non-random and incomplete sampling, and the resulting potential for bias in estimates of demographic parameters.
  - The 1990s MR sample size was small (average 229 total captures per sampling year), relative to the 2010s (average 470 total biopsies per sampling year), and the number of recaptures in the 1990s was low. There were few dead recoveries during the period between MR sampling studies (1998-2010), particularly in the latter years. Small sample sizes make it difficult to estimate demographic parameters and assess subpopulation trend, limiting both the strength of inference that can be drawn from the 1990s data and our ability to quantify and reduce bias in estimates of demographic parameters.
  - The spatial distribution of polar bear physical captures and biopsy samples for the MR studies in the 1990s and 2010s was significantly different. In the 2010s, a larger fraction of bears were captured inland from the coastline, and inside fjords along Baffin Island.
  - The difference in distribution of captures between sampling periods was not due to changes in habitat use. Analyses of satellite telemetry data from adult females, providing an unbiased assessment of land use between decades, showed no differences in distance inland or elevation for onshore bears between the 1990s and 2010s. Thus, the difference in capture distributions were a function of different sampling effort, with less effort expended away from coastlines and inside fjords in the 1990s.
  - Consistent with the differences in sampling effort and temporary emigration between the 1990s and 2010s, there were significant differences in the composition of the MR samples (e.g., the proportion of bears within each age-sex class) between these two periods. Specifically, adult females were under-represented in the 1990s samples.
  - The spatially-defined sampling area (km<sup>2</sup>) in Nunavut encompassed the capture and biopsy locations in both decades and represented a minimum area sampled. The sampling area in the 1990s survey was less than ½ of that sampling in the 2010s. The 2010s sampling area encompassed most fjords along the coast and more inland habitat. To evaluate potential biases associated with the smaller sampling area of the 1990s, MR analyses and estimated parameters were compared from two datasets: (1) all 2010s MR data, and (2) a geographic subset of the 2010s MR data that was comparable to the sampling area in the 1990s (Chapter 5).
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- In the 1990s there was likely a high degree of temporary emigration from the sampling area on the Baffin Island coast because bears used sea ice offshore in Baffin Bay or in the archipelago in summer. Significantly less sea ice was available in the 2010s and temporary emigration was lower. In the 1990s,  $\leq 30\%$  of radio-collared female bears were inside the sampling area during the MR sampling periods, compared to 70-80% in the 2010s. This suggests that a potentially significant proportion of bears were not available for capture each year during the 1990s, though sample sizes for analysis were small. Completely random temporary emigration from the sampling area should not result in biased demographic parameters. However, the degree of temporary emigration in the 1990s appeared variable and dependent on environmental conditions; and small samples sizes made it difficult to rule out significant bias.
  - Additional sources of temporary emigration in the 1990s were non-random and linked to the reproductive cycle of females. Adult females in reproductive classes that were likely pregnant in fall moved farther inland on Baffin Island (e.g., to find suitable denning habitat), compared to non-pregnant females, which likely contributed to the under-sampling of adult females in some years in the 1990s because of the lack of inland sampling.
  - There also were technical challenges with the 1990s MR data. Within the 1990s MR data there was uncertainty in identifying bears that were located with the aid of radio-telemetry vs. those located by standard search (i.e., random encounter). Original capture records could not be located and were inferred by comparing available information to the capture history files compiled for the 1990s BB demographic analysis. This uncertainty could result in bias, because knowing which bears were located by telemetry was important in the most-supported MR models for the 1990s data.
  - Relative to the 2010s data, the 1990s data were characterized by relatively small sample sizes, incomplete geographic sampling, a likely higher degree of temporary emigration for bears that remained on sea ice during the summer, and potential non-random temporary emigration for adult females that moved farther inland to den. These issues led to an increased potential for bias in estimates of survival and abundance from the 1990s data. As a result, demographic parameters estimated from 1990s and 2010s BB data are not directly comparable and there is a limited ability to evaluate subpopulation trends.
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### 3.1. Background

Accurate knowledge of demographic parameters (e.g., survival, abundance) is important for wildlife management decisions such as determining sustainable harvest levels and evaluating subpopulation viability. Mark-recapture (MR) studies are used to estimate demographic parameters because it is generally not feasible to monitor every individual in a subpopulation.

The results from MR studies can be biased by several factors, including heterogeneity in recapture probability ( $p$ ) that is not accounted for through the choice of sampling design or modeling approach (Williams et al. 2002). The magnitude of bias is generally largest for abundance (Pollock et al. 1990) although estimates of survival probability can have meaningful bias as well (Devineau et al. 2006). Estimating accurate and unbiased demographic parameters for polar bears is particularly challenging. First, sample sizes are relatively small due to challenging environmental and logistical conditions, and the high cost of Arctic fieldwork. Second, polar bears are often distributed across large landscapes at low densities. Only a fraction of the study subpopulation may be accessible to researchers, and this fraction may change from year to year based on environmental conditions and logistical constraints. This limits sample sizes, leads to difficulty in delineating subpopulation boundaries, and means that the effective study subpopulation may be different than the biological population of interest. Third, the high mobility of polar bears and inter-annual variability of their sea-ice habitat can lead to nonrandom movements (i.e., temporary emigration) with respect to the sampling area. Fourth, female bears may be less-observable or unobservable for several months when pregnant or associated with maternal dens, leading to an ‘unobservable state’. Fifth, the three-year reproductive cycle of polar bears makes it difficult to estimate reproductive rates and their relationships with environmental conditions. Finally, relatively long-term datasets are required because of the long life span of polar bears and high inter-annual variability in the Arctic environment.

In recent years, methodological advances have led to an increased ability to detect, quantify, and mitigate bias in demographic parameters from MR studies arising from the challenges listed above. Advances include noninvasive genetic methods to increase sample size

(Lukacs and Burnham 2005); multiple sampling occasions per year under a “robust design” (Kendall et al. 1997); spatially-explicit models to account for heterogeneity in recapture probability as a function of site fidelity (Royle et al. 2014); models with “unobservable states” to account for temporary emigration (Schaub et al. 2004); and models that integrate data from multiple sources (Peñaloza et al. 2014). Some of these methods have been employed for polar bears, whereas others have not been used due to lack of familiarity or practical limits on the types of sampling that can be conducted.

The MR study of the Baffin Bay subpopulation 2011-2013 incorporated noninvasive genetic sampling and modelled live-recapture and dead-recovery data in the same analytical framework. Both of these approaches increased sample sizes and reduced susceptibility to some types of bias. Nonetheless, there remained major challenges to the application of MR models to the Baffin Bay data, and in this chapter we evaluate sampling and biological issues that have the potential to introduce bias in estimates of survival and abundance. Similar investigations of bias have become a standard part of MR studies for polar bears (e.g., Regehr et al. 2010), and are necessary to understand the strength of inference that can be drawn from MR studies. In this chapter we focus on reassessing the 1990s BB data because, compared to the 2010s data, the 1990s data had smaller sample sizes, reduced geographic coverage, and other uncertainties and limitations. This assessment directly informs our ability to compare results from the 1990s and 2010s data and evaluate trends in polar bear survival and abundance between sampling periods.

#### Distribution of Mark-Recapture Sampling on Baffin Island

Prior to the 2011-2013 survey of the Baffin Bay subpopulation, MR sampling occurred during several periods. Initial sampling was conducted during the 1970s (northern Baffin Island

and Bylot Island, near Lancaster Sound), early 1980s (east-central Baffin Island), and late 1980s to early 1990s (Canada and Greenland, as part of movement studies; Figure 5.2; Taylor et al. 2005). Early sampling efforts were generally restricted to spring-time and primarily occurred on landfast and nearshore pack ice. These studies documented that an unknown but likely large proportion of the subpopulation was on sea ice farther offshore during the spring and therefore unavailable for capture. We excluded these early data from present analyses (*cf.* Taylor et al. 2005, in which these early data were included) because the early sampling occurred in a different season (i.e., spring) and was spatially variable and restricted. Additionally, lack of tissue samples from early sampling precluded genetic identification for use in the present study.

In 1993–1995 and 1997, more systematic sampling occurred during fall ice-free seasons (during September and October) on Baffin and Bylot islands (Figure 3.1). There was no fall sampling in 1996 due to logistical and resource constraints. These data formed the core of the study reported by Taylor et al. (2005) who estimated the number of polar bears in Baffin Bay at 2,074 (95% confidence interval: 1544–2604) in 1998. Taylor et al. (2001) indicated that a large majority of polar bears were onshore in summer retreat areas on Bylot and Baffin islands during the autumn. Taylor et al. (2005) reported that search effort during the 1990s was uniform and systematic across the coastal regions, islands, and inland reaches of Baffin Island. Consequently, Taylor et al. (2005) suggested that the autumn onshore sampling in 1993–1995 and 1997 provided improved coverage of the subpopulation and more reliable abundance estimates compared to those derived from the 1980s BB data, which Taylor et al. (2005) suggested were biased low.

In 2011–2013 we completed a second fall-time MR sampling study (August – October) on the coasts of Baffin Island (Figure 3.1). Data from West Greenland were also collected (see

Chapter 5, Figure 5.8). During this study, new data on movements and spatial distribution of bears were also obtained via satellite telemetry in BB and KB. This information was used to assess subpopulation boundaries (Chapter 2) and habitat use relative to the 1990s (Chapter 4), but also to improve MR study design (i.e., stratify the study site; Chapter 5) with the objectives of reducing heterogeneity in capture probabilities and more efficiently allocating survey effort. The 2011-2013 study (see Chapter 5) was largely modeled after Taylor et al. (2005) in that bears were targeted during the ice-free season, to obtain estimates of abundance and vital rates that might be comparable to Taylor et al. (2005) therefore useful for assessing trend.

Here we compare the spatial and temporal distribution of physical captures and biopsy sampling on Baffin Island for sampling 1993-1995 and 1997 vs. sampling during 2011-2013 (referred to as the “2010s”). The goal is to evaluate whether there were important differences in sampling, which could lead to different biases or different definitions of the effective study subpopulations (e.g., if a large group of bears was systematically missed in one study period, then the effective study subpopulation for that period would be smaller). Field records (e.g., Global Positioning System helicopter logs, navigation maps) delineating survey effort 1993-1995 and 1997 were unavailable. Therefore, we plotted sighting data from Taylor et al. (2005) in a Geographic Information System (GIS; ArcMap 10.2, ESRI, Redlands, California, USA) to examine the spatial distribution of captures compared to the 2010s. We also used historic and current radio telemetry data to identify whether potential differences in capture locations were influenced by changes in the onshore movements and habitat use of polar bears.

*Methods* – Maps of physical capture and biopsy sampling locations (hereafter collectively referred to as “captures”) on Baffin Island suggested that captures in the 1990s were more limited to coastal areas, whereas captures in the 2010s included bears located farther from the

coast and deep inside fjords, including higher altitudes (Figure 3.1). We examined the hypothesis that the discrepancy in capture locations across periods reflects differences in sampling effort rather than a shift in the onshore distribution of bears. We calculated the distance to the nearest coastline and the distance to the smoothed outer Baffin Island coastline for each capture location in the 1990s and 2010s. The smoothed coastline followed the contour of the true physical coastline of Baffin Island, but was smoothed across fjords with a straight segment orthogonal to the fjord direction. We smoothed fjords only when the distance across the mouth of the fjord was  $\leq 7$  km using an Azimuthal Equidistant projection (WGS84 datum). We calculated the distance to both coastlines (original and smoothed) for all captures of independent bears (i.e., age 2 or older) that were located on mainland Baffin and Bylot islands (i.e., not on offshore islands) and were successfully genotyped.

We compared the distance-to-coast results to locations of radio-collared bears onshore during the 1990s and 2010s to evaluate whether differences in capture locations reflected differences in sampling effort or differences in the distribution of bears. Given that recent analyses of movement data suggest significant changes in sea-ice habitat use and onshore timing (Chapter 4), we considered the possibility that bears had also changed their behavior and habitat use while on land. First, we verified that the sample of 1990s bears collared in the fall on Baffin Island were comparable to the sample of 2010s bears collared in the spring in West Greenland, by assessing what fraction of spring-collared bears used the area on Baffin Island where bears were collared in the fall (see details in Chapter 2). Overall, 92% of the 2010s spring-captured bears used the fall collaring area. This suggests that, although radio-collaring occurred in different seasons and areas across the two time periods, the collared bears exhibited similar



movement and habitat use patterns, and therefore provided comparable data for evaluating onshore habitat use across time periods.

Using satellite telemetry data, we calculated the distance inland from the smoothed coastline and Digital Elevation Model (DEM) elevation (m) for all locations of collared female bears during summer months (August-October). We used land covariates derived from the 22 m<sup>2</sup> ASTER GDEM for all positions in Canada (<http://www.jspacesystems.or.jp/ersdac/GDEM/E/4.html>). We only used adult female bears on Baffin Island and calculations excluded resident bears that remained year-round on the Melville Bay glacier ice.

We also examined distance to the smoothed Baffin Island coastline for adult females as a function of reproductive status (captured alone, as mating pairs; or with COY, yearlings, 2-year old cubs) to evaluate whether this factor may have influenced temporary emigration with respect to the sampling area (particularly the nearer-shore sampling area in the 1990s). For this specific analysis (reproductive state examination) we only examined adult females in the year of collar deployment because their reproductive status was known at the time of capture in spring, thus could be assumed in fall. We excluded bears on sea ice during August-October.

*Results* – The mean distance of captures to the smoothed coastline was smaller in the 1990s ( $\bar{x}$  = 5.1 km, SD = 7.2,  $n$  = 438) compared to the 2010s ( $\bar{x}$  = 8.6, SD = 11.9,  $n$  = 766, Mann-Whitney U test:  $z$  = 3.4,  $P$  < 0.001). Detailed results are provided in Table 3.2. Furthermore, a greater proportion of independent bears were captured near the smoothed coastline during the 1990s than the 2010s (Figure 3.2). For example, 84% of captures occurred within 10 km of the smoothed coastline during 1993 – 1997, compared to 72% of captures during 2011 – 2013. Similarly, one independent bear was captured > 35 km from the smoothed

coastline during the 1990s sampling, whereas 28 independent bears were sampled > 35 km from the smoothed coastline during the 2010s. The corresponding analysis using satellite telemetry found no significant differences in the distance of adult females from the smoothed Baffin Island coastline between the 1990s and 2010s; adult female bears on average in the 1990s were about a mean 17 km from the smoothed coast in August and September, where as in the 2000s they were about 13 km in those months, however standard errors were overlapping (Figure 3.4). Also, there were no differences in the mean monthly elevation used by adult females on Baffin Island between the 1990s and 2010s (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).

Satellite telemetry analyses further documented differences in the inland distance of adult females on Baffin Island as a function of reproductive status. Females that were most likely available to breed and become pregnant in spring (e.g., those captured alone, with 2 year old cubs, or as mating pairs in spring) were significantly farther inland in fall than adult females captured with COYs or yearling cubs (Table 3.2). This was especially pronounced for adult females captured in mating pairs (on average 27-35 km inland).

In contrast to analyses based on distance to the smoothed coastline, the distance of captures to the true coastline (not smoothed) was consistent between sampling periods (Figure 3.3), averaging 1.8 km (SD = 2.8) in the 1990s and 1.5 km (SD = 2.5) in the 2010s. This suggests that the difference in capture locations between the two sampling periods was largely due to less effort spent searching and capturing bears in the inland portions of fjords in the 1990s compared to the 2010s. For adult females, mean distances to the true coastline were 6.4 km (SD: 8.0) and 10.2 km (SD: 12.6) during the 1990s and 2010s, respectively (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

*Summary* – The distribution of polar bear captures on Baffin Island differed significantly between sampling in the 1990s and 2010s. Specifically, the capture data indicate an under-

representation of bears in fjords and inland regions during the 1990s (see also Chapter 5).

Satellite telemetry location data, which were collected from independent bears over several years and were not influenced by which areas were searched in any given year, did not suggest a shift in the onshore distribution of polar bears. Given that no changes in adult female use of land habitats was detected (also see Chapter 4 terrestrial resource selection), the differences in capture distribution can be attributed to differences in sampling. During the 1990s, capture effort was concentrated on islands, along the outer coastline, and near the mouths of fjords (Figures 3.2 and 3.4). During the 2010s, these areas were searched as well as the inland portions of fjords. This is particularly prominent in central and northern Baffin Island, where no captures were recorded beyond the mouths of fjords during the 1990s. In contrast to the southern parts of Baffin Island the central and northern parts have a higher and more mountainous terrain. Finally, satellite telemetry data also indicate that adult females in different reproductive status show a non-random pattern of moving farther inland, likely in search of locations to construct maternal dens. These findings suggest a non-random probability of being a temporary emigrant as a function of the multi-year reproductive state. Taken together, these findings suggest that restricted geographic sampling in the 1990s likely led to higher probabilities of temporary emigration from the sampling area during that time period, compared to the 2010s. Furthermore, the probability of being a temporary emigrant appears non-random. Variable and non-random temporary emigration is known to introduce bias into estimates of survival and abundance under some conditions (Peñaloza et al. 2014).

#### Size of the Mark-Recapture Sampling Area on Baffin Island

Following from the previous section, we calculated the sizes of the effective MR sampling areas on Baffin Island in the 1990s and 2010s.

*Methods* – We delineated the sampling areas based on the spatial distribution of capture locations. We first used ArcGIS to create 99% kernel density contour around all capture locations in each time period. We then adjusted this contour on a point-by-point basis to ensure that the final estimated sampling area was within 1 km of the outermost capture locations. The sampling area did not extend offshore, except in a few cases in the 1990s where there were offshore points, in which case the boundary was kept within 1 km of those points. When capture locations occurred inside a fjord, it was assumed that sampling effort occurred everywhere from the mouth of that fjord to the capture location.

*Results* – The size of the MR sampling areas differed significantly between the 1990s and 2010s. The estimated sampling area was ~28,700 km<sup>2</sup> in the 1990s and ~60,200 km<sup>2</sup> in the 2010s. The 2010s sampling area included most fjords along the Baffin Island coast and reached farther inland than the 1990s (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). Furthermore, the 1990s sampled area was almost entirely contained within the 2010s sampling area (Figure 3.8). This made it possible to subsample the 2010s capture data, using the restricted 1990s sampling area, for the purpose of evaluating the influence of the size of sampling area on estimates of abundance from the two time periods (see Chapter 5).

#### Temporary Emigration Related to the Availability of Sea ice

Previous sections in this chapter documented a smaller onshore sampling area in the 1990s, which likely resulted in higher and potentially non-random temporary emigration from the sampling area in the 1990s. Here we evaluate temporary emigration related to the

availability of sea ice, which declined between the two study periods in all months of the year, including the summer when sampling on Baffin Island occurred. We used satellite telemetry data to assess the fraction of adult females that were located in the sampling area vs. out of the sampling area (including on the sea ice) in the 1990s compared to the 2010s.

*Methods* – For each year of sampling in the 1990s and 2010s, we used the specific date range when sampling occurred (Table 3.3) to calculate the proportion of independent collared bears located inside the sampling area, as well as the proportion of locations from each individual bear that were inside the sampling area. First, we identified independent adult females that were wearing functional radio-collars during the sampling period. To ensure that location data were independent, we did not include locations from the same sampling period on which an adult female was captured and fitted with a radio-collar. For example, if a bear was captured and collared on October 1, 1993, locations from that individual through October 8, 1993 were not used (Table 3.3). However, locations from that individual in 1994 and 1995 were considered independent and included in analyses. If a bear was captured in spring of a given year, her location data were considered independent by fall of that year. We considered a bear to be located inside the sampling area if that bear had 1 (or more) telemetry location inside the sampling area.

We evaluated average sea-ice conditions in Baffin Bay during each sampling period for the 1990s and 2010s to determine whether bears that were located outside of the sampling area, were located on sea ice. For each sampling period, we mapped mean sea-ice concentration during the week that encompassed the mid-point of the sampling period, using the Passive Microwave data (SMMR/SSM/I) sea-ice concentration dataset from the National Snow and Ice Data Center (see Chapter 4). We then superimposed independent bear locations on the sea-ice

concentration map, and visually examined whether bears located outside of the sampled area were in an area with a substantial concentration of sea ice and therefore likely using the sea ice.

*Results* – Table 3.3 shows the date range of MR sampling in each year. There were a maximum of 13 independent adult female bears transmitting with satellite collars during the 1990s sampling periods. The number of individuals declined over the course of the 1990s study because most collars were deployed at the beginning of the study and some collars failed (Table 3.4). The largest number of transmitting independent bears occurred in 1993, and by 1997 there were none. There were also a maximum of 13 transmitting independent bears during a given sampling period in the 2010s, although sample sizes remained higher through the 2010s due to longer collar attachment periods (Table 3.4). We found large differences in the proportion of transmitting independent bears using the sampling areas between 1990s and 2010s. In the 1990s, 0-20% of females occurred within the sampling area during the MR sampling period (Table 3.4, Figure 3.9 - 3.11). In the 2010s, 67-80% of females occurred within the sampling area during the MR sampling period (Table 3.4, Figure 3.12 - 3.14).

Sea-ice availability in Baffin Bay declined between the 1990s and 2010s. In the 1990s, a substantial amount of sea ice was available in offshore central Baffin Bay; within the Canadian archipelago, including around Devon Island; and in Lancaster Sound and Kane Basin (Figures 3.15-3.21). In 1993, when the largest proportion of independent bears was offshore during the sample period (Figure 3.15), there was a persistent area of sea ice available in central Baffin Bay. In other years in the 1990s, some bears were located on the advancing sea ice forming in northern Baffin Bay (Figures 3.15-3.17). In contrast, in the 2010s all bears (excluding resident bears in Melville Bay) were distributed on land on Baffin Island or in Kane Basin (Figures 3.18-3.20) during the sampling periods. There were no bears on offshore ice in the 2010s, because sea

ice had melted completely in central Baffin Bay by July (see Chapter 4). The differences in sea-ice conditions between the 1990s and 2010s can be seen clearly using juxtaposed sea-ice concentration maps (Figure 3.21).

In addition to relatively fewer adult females being present in the sampling area during the 1990s, most bears with >1 location in the sampling area did not spend the entire sampling period there, but rather were passing through (Table 3.5). In the 1990s, approximately 44% of locations received for bears that used the sampling area, were located inside the sampled area (see Chapter 1 for information on location filtering and subsampling). In the 2010s, approximately 94% of locations received for bears that used the sampling area, were located inside the sampled area. Although sample sizes were small and unevenly distributed across years, the higher probability of bears in the 1990s being located outside the sampling area appeared largely due to the presence of sea ice, whereas in the 2010s sea ice was absent and bears exhibited reduced summertime movement rates (see Chapter 4).

*Summary* – Temporary emigration from the sampling area during the autumn sampling period has the potential to introduce bias into estimates of demographic parameters from this study. Our analyses suggest that the proportion of adult females (and presumably other sex and age classes) in the sampling area was likely lower in the 1990s compared to the 2010s, for two reasons. First, some bears located inland in the 1990s were not available to capture teams because there was apparently limited inland search effort, and in particular bears were not captured in the deep inland portions of fjords. Furthermore, the location of bears from the coast—and therefore the susceptibility of bears to capture—appeared related to reproductive status, in which case the probability of being a temporary emigrant may have been nonrandom. Second, a proportion of radio-collared polar bears used offshore ice in the 1990s, whereas sea ice

was less available in the 2010s and therefore a substantially higher proportion of bears were likely inside the sampling area. Because of small sample sizes that varied across years, we were unable to calculate precise estimates of temporary emigration rates or to evaluate the magnitude and direction nonrandom patterns (e.g., Markovian dependence) in a statistically rigorous manner. Nonetheless, multiple lines of evidence indicate higher temporary emigration in the 1990s, compared to the 2010s. The most likely effect of temporary emigration is an unknown but potentially meaningful negative bias in estimates of survival and abundance (Schaub et al. 2004, Devineau et al. 2006, Peñaloza et al. 2014).

#### Additional sampling considerations

Small sample sizes lead to multiple challenges into MR studies, including high variance in estimated parameters, small-sample bias, susceptibility to bias due to violation of modeling assumptions (e.g., un-modeled heterogeneity in recapture probability), and limited options for quantifying or mitigating bias (Williams et al. 2002). Compared to the 2010s data, sample sizes in the 1990s were small and had a low proportion of recaptures (Table 3.1). For example, the entire dataset for adult females (F2+ age group) included only 5 animals recaptured by standard search in 1995, and 14 animals recaptured by standard search in 1997 (note that numbers in Table 3.1 are higher, because they include “likely” recaptures and re-sightings of bears located by radio telemetry; see below). Furthermore, there were relatively few dead recoveries during the interim period when no sampling occurred (1998-2010), particularly in the later years. For example, an average of 1.3 research-marked females per year were recovered in the harvest, from 1998-2010. Conceptually, it is apparent that the small number of live recaptures during 1990s live-encounter sampling, the gap years between 1990s and 2010s sampling, and the small



number of dead recoveries during the gap years contain a limited amount of information and will lead to estimates of demographic parameters that have substantial uncertainty and low resolution (i.e., that few demographic parameters can be estimated, requiring the estimation of “average” parameters over years or groups of animals).

There were significant differences in the composition of the MR samples (i.e., the proportion of bears within each age-sex class, based on initial captures) between the 1990s and 2010s in Baffin Bay (Table 3.1). There were more adult and sub-adult male captures in the 1990s, whereas there were more sub-adult and adult female captures in the 2010s. The proportion of total female captures in the 1990s was less than the 2010s (mean annual proportion of age 2+ female captures : total 2+ captures, 1990s: 0.42; 2010s: 0.53; Table 3.1). Given the spatial segregation of bears by sex and age-classes and reproductive states (see section Distribution of Mark-recapture Sampling on Baffin Island), the apparent under-representation of females in the 1990s samples likely reflects at least in part the coastal-focused sampling protocols during that period, rather than true differences in the composition of the subpopulation (although we cannot rule out progressive depletion of males through the 2010s due to high harvest).

#### Development of an Individual Covariate to Explain Inland Habitat Use

Given the apparent differences in sampling effort between the 1990s and 2010s, the spatial segregation of bears by sex and age class, and differences in the composition of capture samples, we hypothesized that proximity to the coastline may explain variation in recapture probabilities. We also wanted to explore whether proximity to the coastline for an individual bear was nonrandom across years (e.g., whether bears captured inland were more likely to be

recaptured inland). We assigned capture locations to either coastal or inland categories, using a threshold of 2 km from true and smoothed coastlines, and compiled contingency tables for individuals captured in multiple sampling periods. For individuals captured three or more times, we used only an individual's first two capture events and included only those bears initially captured as independent animals, since the locations of cubs-of-the-year and yearlings were dependent on the location of their mothers.

Use of inland areas appeared nonrandom. Individual polar bears initially captured inland from the true coastline were more likely to be recaptured inland in subsequent years (all data:  $\chi^2 = 10.4$ ,  $P = 0.0012$ ; 1990s only: Fisher's exact test  $P = 0.10$ ; 2010s only: Fisher's exact test  $P = 0.02$ ). Similarly, bears initially captured inland of the smoothed coastline were more likely to be recaptured inland (all data  $\chi^2 = 18.1$ ,  $P < 0.0001$ ), a pattern which was driven largely by the 2010s (Fisher's exact test  $P < 0.0001$ ; 2010s only: Fisher's exact test  $P = 0.21$ ; 1990s only). As such, we incorporated a proximity to coastline covariate for modeling recapture probability in demographic analyses (see Chapter 5).

#### Challenges with Using the 1990s Radio Telemetry Data

Some aspects of the 1990s radio-telemetry data were uncertain or unavailable, presenting challenges to the use of these data in the current analysis. As part of a study examining subpopulation delineation and spatial ecology (Ferguson et al. 1997, Taylor et al. 2001), a sample of adult female polar bears was fitted with satellite radio-collars in Baffin Bay (from both Canada and Greenland) during the 1990s. Some of these bears ( $n = 14$ ) were captured on Baffin and Bylot Islands during autumn 1993 – 1997. Taylor et al. (2005) report that collared bears and their dependent young were often relocated using VHF during the 1990s study period. The

probability of locating and recapturing a bear with a collar is likely higher than the probability of recapturing a bear without a collar. Therefore, a radio telemetry covariate, describing whether a bear was wearing a functional radio-collar that could have allowed it to be located by telemetry, was important for explaining variation in recapture probabilities; and all of the most-supported models in the 1990s included a radio telemetry covariate (Taylor et al. 2005). Taylor et al. (2005:209) reported that “The probability of autumn recapture was lower for females and yearling cubs than for adult males and sub-adults, except for radio-collared females and their young” which indicates that radio-collared females were recaptured using radio-location data. Unfortunately, the data archives did not include complete information on which bears were wearing functional radio-collars and located using VHF. Furthermore, in some cases where records could be located, there were inconsistencies among databases and historical hard-copy files. This presented a challenge to MR modeling because the live-capture data in the 1990s were sparse, particularly for adult females, and we anticipated that the additional records for bears likely recaptured using VHF would be important for explaining patterns in survival and recapture probability (see Taylor et al. 2005). To address this issue, we manually reviewed capture histories and covariates compiled for the previous Baffin Bay analysis. We compared these historical files with our available records to identify events in which a bear was likely located via VHF (see also Chapter 5). Based on this, we added 7 recapture events of 5 age 2+ individuals previously in the dataset, and 6 capture events of 5 age 2+ individuals not previously included in the dataset. We believe that this protocol accurately incorporated most of the data for polar bears captured by VHF in the 1990s, although some uncertainty remains given that the original data were not available.

### Ramifications of Issues with the 1990s Baffin Bay Data

It is difficult to estimate demographic parameters and detect trends in parameters, for long-lived animals using short time-series of live-encounter data, especially when recapture rates are low, environmental variation is high, and the entire study subpopulation is not exposed to sampling effort on each occasion (Williams et al. 2002). The analyses described above identify specific challenges with 1990s Baffin Bay MR data that arise from both sampling issues and environmental factors. These challenges may lead to bias in estimates of survival and abundance, and ambiguity in the definitions of parameters being estimated (e.g., whether a model is estimating apparent survival, which reflects emigration from the study subpopulation, or true survival).

*Survival* – A statistical assessment of trends in polar bear survival between the 1990s and 2010s is not possible due to the short duration of live-encounter sampling periods, the large gap between 1990s and 2010s live-encounter sampling, low recapture probabilities, low numbers of dead recoveries, changes in the sampling area between the 1990s and 2010s, and evidence for changes in polar bear movements with respect to the sampling area. This conclusion was supported by computer simulations (T. Arnold, University of Minnesota, unpubl data) in Program MARK to generate datasets that resembled the actual Baffin Bay data but included a known effect (e.g., large reduction in survival), and evaluating the power of MR model to detect such effects (T. Arnold, University of Minnesota, unpublished data). In the context of small and variable sample sizes, a primary challenge for estimating survival is the difficulty of delineating temporary vs. permanent emigration from the study area, and the effects of emigration on estimates of survival. MR modeling was performed using Burnham models, which assume that emigration from the study subpopulation is permanent. Burnham models directly estimate the

probability of permanent emigration ( $F$ ) based on patterns in live-encounter data in conjunction with harvest data collected from an area that is larger than the MR sampling area. Under the Burnham model, the survival parameter ( $S$ ) is technically defined as true survival (i.e., does not include an emigration component). However, research-marked bears that are harvested outside the sampling area may be temporary rather than permanent emigrants (i.e., the bears could have returned to the sampling area in future years, if they had not been killed), and the short duration of the study, small sample sizes, and likely high interannual variability in the probability of being a temporary emigrant (e.g., as related to sea-ice availability) make it difficult to delineate temporary vs. permanent emigration. Simulations suggested that the Baffin Bay data were too sparse to fit Barker models, which relax the assumption that emigration is permanent, and are capable of estimating temporary emigration rates, including non-random temporary emigration. The consequence of using Burnham models either with  $F$  estimated or with  $F$  fixed = 1 (i.e., assuming no permanent emigration if  $F$  is estimated), is that variation across individuals and sampling occasions in the probability of being a temporary emigrant is not explicitly accounted for, and therefore exists as variation in recapture probabilities. Heterogeneity in recapture probabilities has the potential to introduce bias into estimates of  $S$  (Schaub et al. 2004). The directionality of bias is often negative and its magnitude tends to increase in the final years of a study (Devineau et al. 2006). Furthermore, non-random patterns in temporary emigration are known to cause bias in estimates of survival (Kendall et al. 1997), and the availability of adult females for capture in the 1990s was related to their multi-year reproductive cycle.

Interpretation of trends in survival between the 1990s and 2010s is further complicated because radio-telemetry data suggest changes in fidelity to the MR sampling study area between the epochs, and because the geographic extent of the MR study area itself changed. We conclude

that estimates of survival from the current MR analysis of Baffin Bay data must be interpreted with caution. Although estimates of survival provide the basis for discussion and ecological interpretation, they are unlikely to be directly comparable between the 1990s and 2010s, and will require further analysis (e.g., regarding different assumptions about movements between epochs) if used in matrix-type models for subpopulation projections.

*Abundance* – Estimating abundance is one of the more difficult challenges in wildlife management (Williams et al. 2002). Deriving accurate estimates of abundance and evaluating trends in abundance over time require an appropriate study design and, especially, consistent distribution of sampling effort in time and space. In the current study, the difference between the distributions of captures in the 1990s and 2010s suggest that the sampling area on Baffin Island expanded substantially from the 1990s to the 2010s. Specifically, sampling was spatially restricted to a portion of the subpopulation’s fall range during the 1990s, thus excluding bears with seasonal fidelity to inland areas. Furthermore, an unknown but potentially significant portion of the Baffin Bay subpopulation may not have been exposed to sampling in the 1990s due to the higher presence of sea ice, which some bears used throughout the year rather than coming onto land. We conclude that the abundance estimate in the 2010s, based on MR data from the entire sampling area, is not directly comparable to the previous 1990s abundance estimate. To investigate the extent to which differences in sampling affected abundance estimates from the 1990s and 2010s, we used the 1990s sampling area to create a subset of the 2010s data, and subsequently derived a 2010s abundance estimate based on this restricted subset of the data. We included only those 2011 – 2013 capture events that were located within the estimated 1990s sampling frame and completed supplemental demographic analyses (see Chapter 5). This analysis helped evaluate the potential biases associated with the more restricted

area of onshore sampling on Baffin Island in the 1990s. However, it did not address the potential effects of polar bears using the sea ice in the 1990s. When there is temporary emigration from the sampling area, estimates of abundance from Burnham models represent the “superpopulation” (defined as all animals with a probability of moving through the sampling area, even if not every animal was actually in the sampling area on every sampling occasion). If temporary emigration from the sampling area is completely random, it will not introduce bias into estimates of abundance. However, nonrandom temporary emigration (e.g., if some individuals are often or always temporary emigrants) has a similar effect on estimates of demographic parameters from MR models as un-modeled heterogeneity in recapture probability, and generally introduces negative bias into estimates of abundance (Kendall et al. 1997).

*MR model covariates* – 1990s sampling bias may also impact the individual, geographic fidelity covariate (proximity to smoothed coastline). Analyses did not suggest a significant relationship between initial and subsequent capture locations in the 1990s, but this may be due to sampling (e.g., not enough effort was expended inland, to identify animals with fidelity to inland areas). The relationship is driven by the 2010s data. Also, the radio telemetry covariate may be biased in some unknown direction due to the uncertainty as to whether the subsequent capture of a collared bear was facilitated by the radio tracking. Sensitivity analyses outlined above may help better understand potential biases. Given the differences between the 1990s and 2010s, including epoch effects for the binary ‘proximity to smoothed coastline’ is important.

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**Table 3.1.** Summary table of live captures and dead recoveries during the mark-recapture study of the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation in Nunavut, Canada, and Greenland, 1993 – 2010. Shaded cells indicate that data were not possible due to an absence of marking or recapture.

	Initial captures						Live recaptures				Dead recoveries							
	Females			Males			Females		Males		Females			Males				
	Coy	Yrl	2+	Coy	Yrl	2+	Yrl	2+	Yrl	2+	Coy	Yrl	2+	Coy	Yrl	2+		
1993	14	8	53	12	8	61					0	0	1	0	0	0		
1994	26	13	65	16	9	77	0	5	0	14	0	0	3	0	0	7		
1995	15	11	62	19	11	85	4	11	4	23	0	2	6	1	0	8		
1996												1	8			0	7	
1997	22	10	60	19	13	113			20			31	0	0	6	0	1	9
1998												0	3			0	11	
1999															3			9
2000															0			8
2001															2			8
2002															0			11
2003															0			7
2004															1			7
2005															2			3
2006															3			6
2007															1			2
2008															2			4

2009													2			0
2010													0			1
2011	2	23	163	1	20	148		5		5	0	0	4	0	0	20
2012	40	30	221	35	30	192	3	41	0	54	0	0	8	0	2	14
2013	28	15	121	16	15	90	4	48	5	55	0	1	8	1	0	20
<b>Totals</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>162</b>

**Table 3.2.** Metrics for adult females satellite collared in the 1990s (fall) and 2010s (spring) for the distance inland from the outer Baffin Island coast. Distance is reported in km.

Adult Female Accompanied by	N	August			September			October		
		Mean distance inland	SD	Count of locations	Mean distance inland	SD	Count of locations	Mean distance inland	SD	Count of locations
1990s										
2YR	1							5.6	4.4	3
AM	0									
COY	15	10.8	14.2	10	19.7	15.1	13	9.6	5.9	46
YRL	12	6.0	5.6	3	18.0	17.8	25	8.4	5.8	41
ALONE	5				8.8	9.4	6	13.4	11.8	8
2010s										
2YR	5	13.5	9.3	25	27.0	8.3	20	16.2	13.5	11
AM -in spring	2	27.1	10.2	9	32.6	12.0	5	35.1	9.3	4
COY	2	5.5	4.8	3	7.5	4.3	13	3.6	4.3	11
YRL	7	3.5	5.0	20	6.8	6.2	33	6.2	7.3	27
ALONE	6	11.9	10.8	25	16.3	7.6	22	14.4	7.8	18

**Table 3.3.** Time periods when the BB fall sampling period occurred in each decade. These dates were used to assess if independent bears were in or out of the sampled area.

<b>Year of sampling</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>
1993	23 August	8 October
1994	7 September	19 October
1995	17 September	19 October
1996	n/a	n/a
1997	21 September	29 October
2011	4 September	14 October
2012	26 August	29 September
2013	20 August	11 October

**Table 3.4.** The overall fraction of independent collared adult female (AF) bears found in the sampling range by year.

Year of sampling	n independent collared bears	n independent AF bears in the sampled area (minimum of n=1 location during date range)		% independent AF bears in the sampled area for each decade
1993	13	3		23
1994	5	1		20
1995	1	0		0
1997	0			
2011	12	8		67
2012	13	11		85
2013	6	4		67

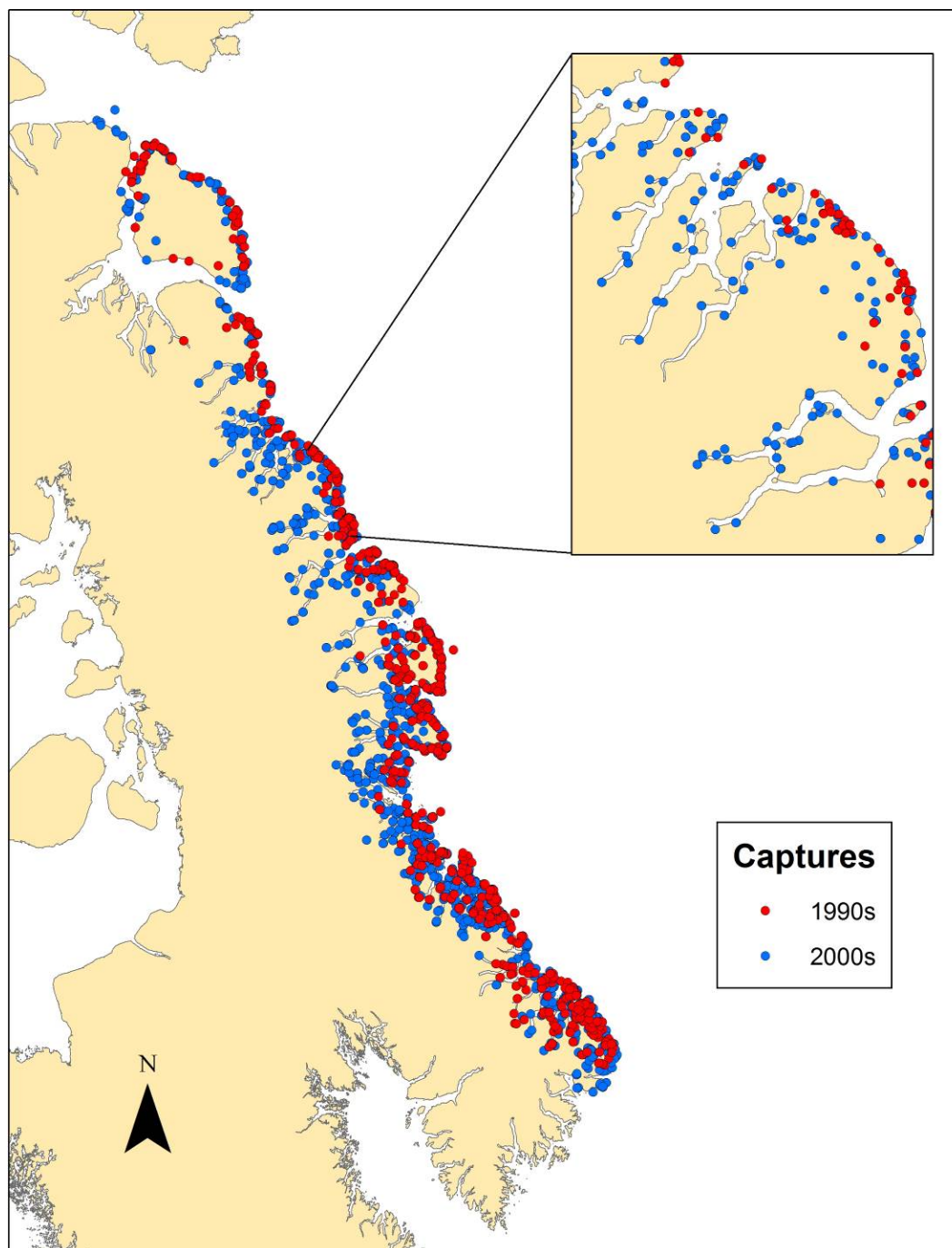
**Table 3.5.** Independent BB adult female bears with satellite collars transmitting during the MR sample periods. Bears listed are only those that used the sampled area on Baffin Island for each decade. The fraction of locations inside the sampled area is shown for each bear.

<b>YEAR + capture season</b>	<b>ID (PTT + Year)</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>	<b>n independent bears during this year</b>	<b>n independent bears in the sampled area</b>	<b>Fraction of total locations inside sampled area during the sampling dates</b>	<b>Proportion of locations</b>
<b>1993</b>		<b>23-Aug</b>	<b>8-Oct</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>		
fall	199111062	27-Aug	16-Sep			1/4	0.25
spring	19922718	24-Aug	7-Oct			1/8	0.13
fall	19922700	25-Aug	25-Aug			1/1	1.00
<b>1994</b>		<b>7-Sep</b>	<b>19-Oct</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>		
spring	19922701	8-Sep	6-Oct			2/6	0.33
<b>2011</b>		<b>4-Sep</b>	<b>14-Oct</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>		
spring	201068010	6-Sep	8-Oct			8/9	0.89
spring	2011105814	24-Sep	10-Oct			4/4	1.00
spring	201074768	6-Sep	12-Oct			8/8	1.00
spring	2011105809	6-Oct	6-Oct			1/1	1.00
spring	200974767	6-Sep	12-Oct			10/10	1.00
spring	2011105817	4-Sep	14-Oct			10/10	1.00
spring	2011105816	4-Sep	14-Oct			5/5	1.00

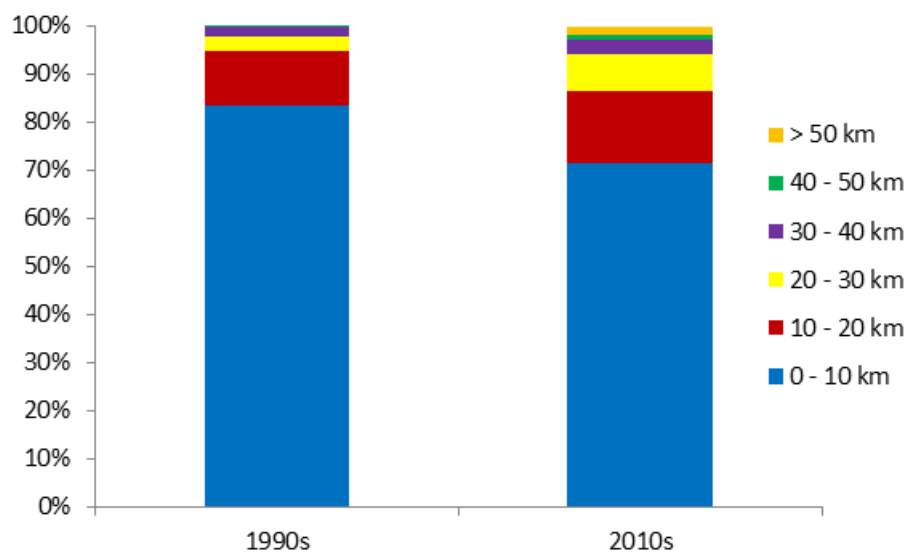
spring	200968005	6-Sep	12-Oct			10/10	1.00
<b>2012</b>		<b>26-Aug</b>	<b>29-Sep</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>		
spring	201074774	29-Aug	26-Sep			6/7	0.86
spring	2012105829	29-Aug	26-Sep			5/7	0.71
spring	201068010	12-Sep	24-Sep			2/3	0.67
spring	2011105814	29-Aug	26-Sep			5/7	0.71
spring	201074768	27-Aug	28-Sep			7/8	0.88
spring	2011105808	29-Aug	26-Sep			7/8	0.88
spring	2011105809	6-Sep	6-Sep			1/1	1.00
spring	200974767	27-Aug	28-Sep			1/9	1.90
spring	200974771	29-Aug	26-Sep			8/8	1.00
spring	2011105813	29-Aug	22-Sep			2/6	0.33
spring	200968005	27-Aug	27-Aug			1/1	1.00
<b>2013</b>		<b>20-Aug</b>	<b>11-Oct</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>		
spring	2013105818	20-Aug	11-Oct			12/12	1.00
spring	2013128265	20-Aug	11-Oct			14/14	1.00



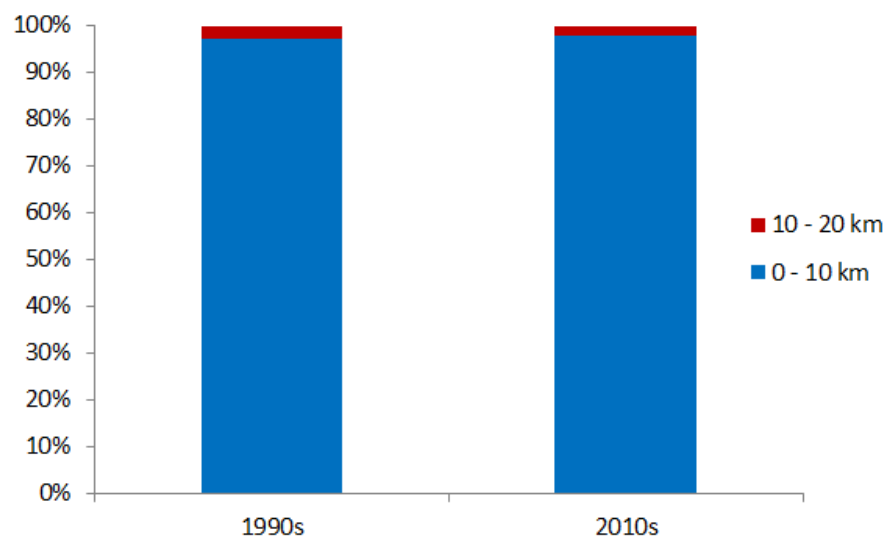
**Figure 3.1.** Locations of polar bears sampled in Baffin Bay during the 1990s (August – October, 1993 – 1995, 1997, red) and 2010s (August – October, 2011 – 2013, blue). Sampling in Greenland in the 2010s occurred near Melville Bay but is not shown. Note the absence of captures in fjords on Baffin Island during the 1990s in the inset.



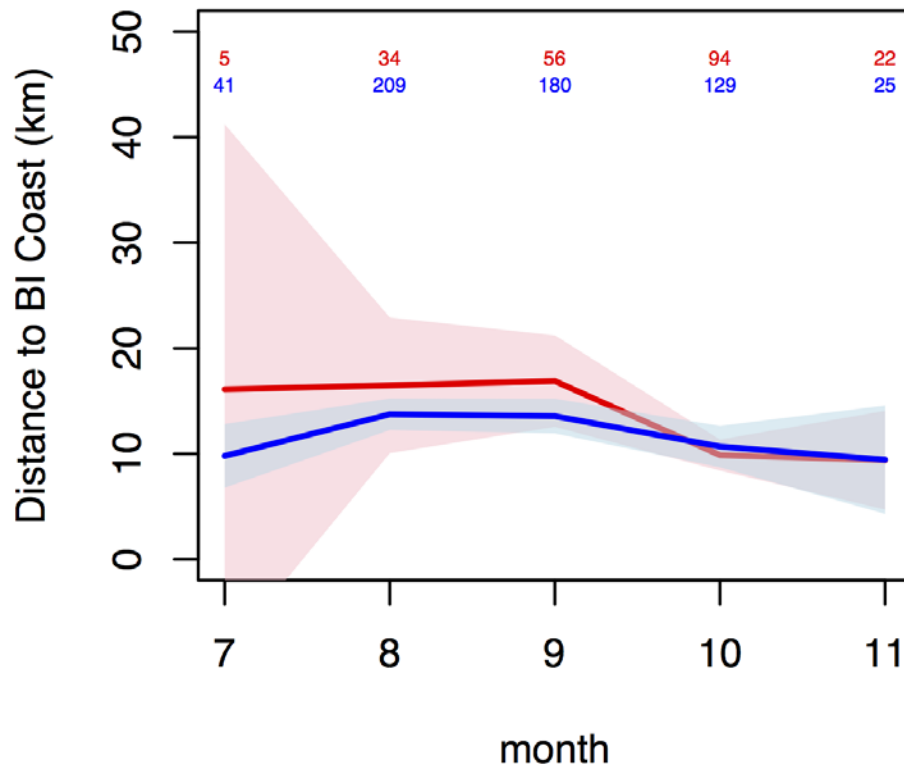
**Figure 3.2.** Distances independent bears were captured from the smoothed coastlines of Baffin and Bylot Islands during fall-time sampling in the Baffin Bay subpopulation, 1993 – 1997 and 2011 – 2013.



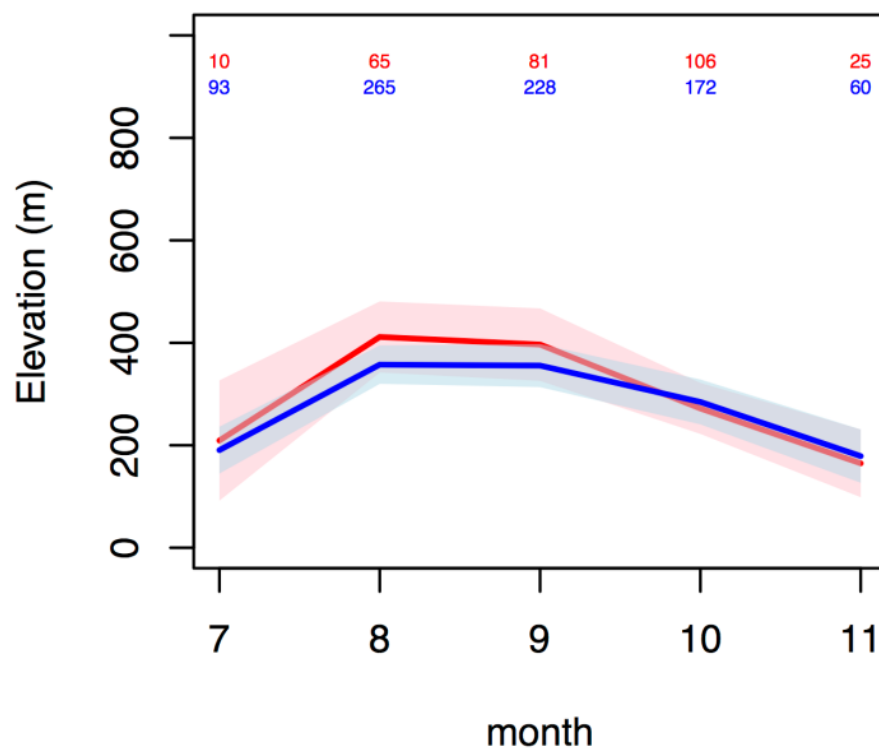
**Figure 3.3.** Distances independent bears were captured from the true coastlines of Baffin and Bylot Islands during fall-time sampling in the Baffin Bay subpopulation, 1993 – 1997 and 2011 – 2013.



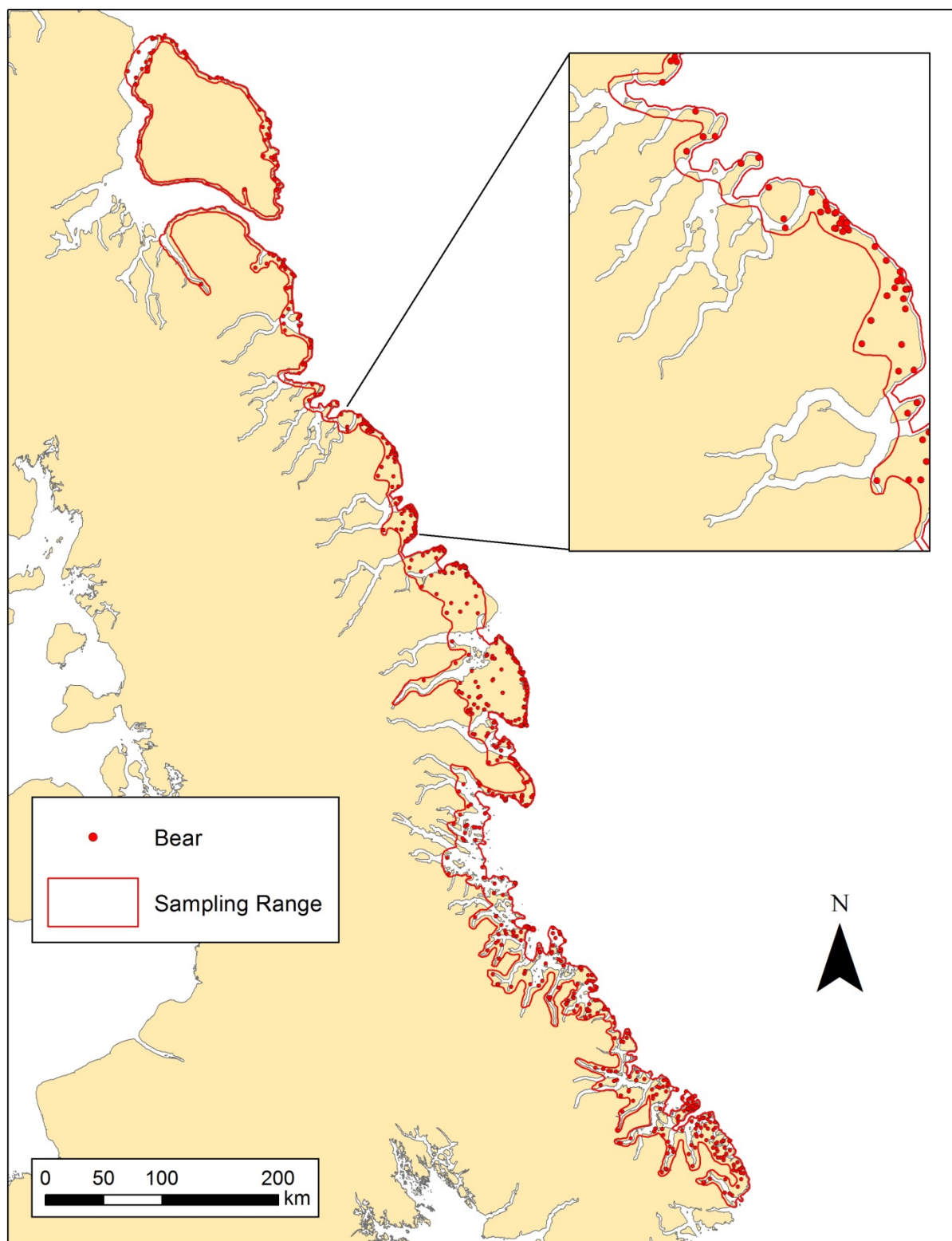
**Figure 3.4.** Distance to smoothed Baffin Island coastline shown in all summer months using satellite telemetry data from adult females in the 1990s (red) and 2010s (blue) located on Baffin Island. Shaded regions represent 2 SE from the mean. Numbers above represent numbers of telemetry locations for each month. There was no difference in distance inland (or distance to the outer Baffin Island coast) between decades.



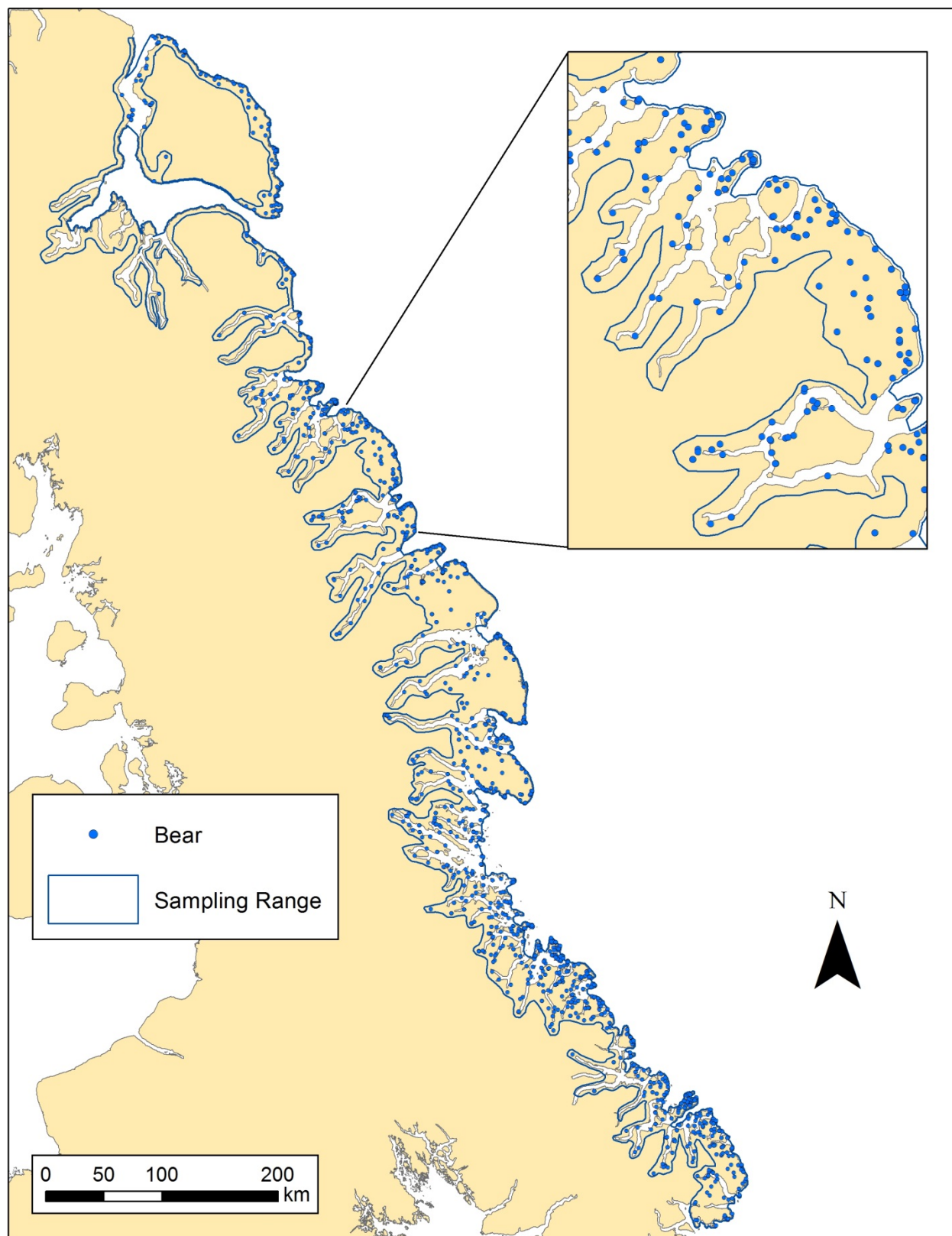
**Figure 3.5.** Elevation of adult female polar bears on Baffin Island shown in all summer months using satellite telemetry data from the 1990s (red) and 2010s (blue). Shaded regions represent 2 SE from the mean. Numbers above represent numbers of telemetry locations for each month. There was no difference in elevations used by polar bears across months between decades.



**Figure 3.6.** The delineation of the sampled area shown with a red outline for the 1990s with capture locations collected during the MR sampling.

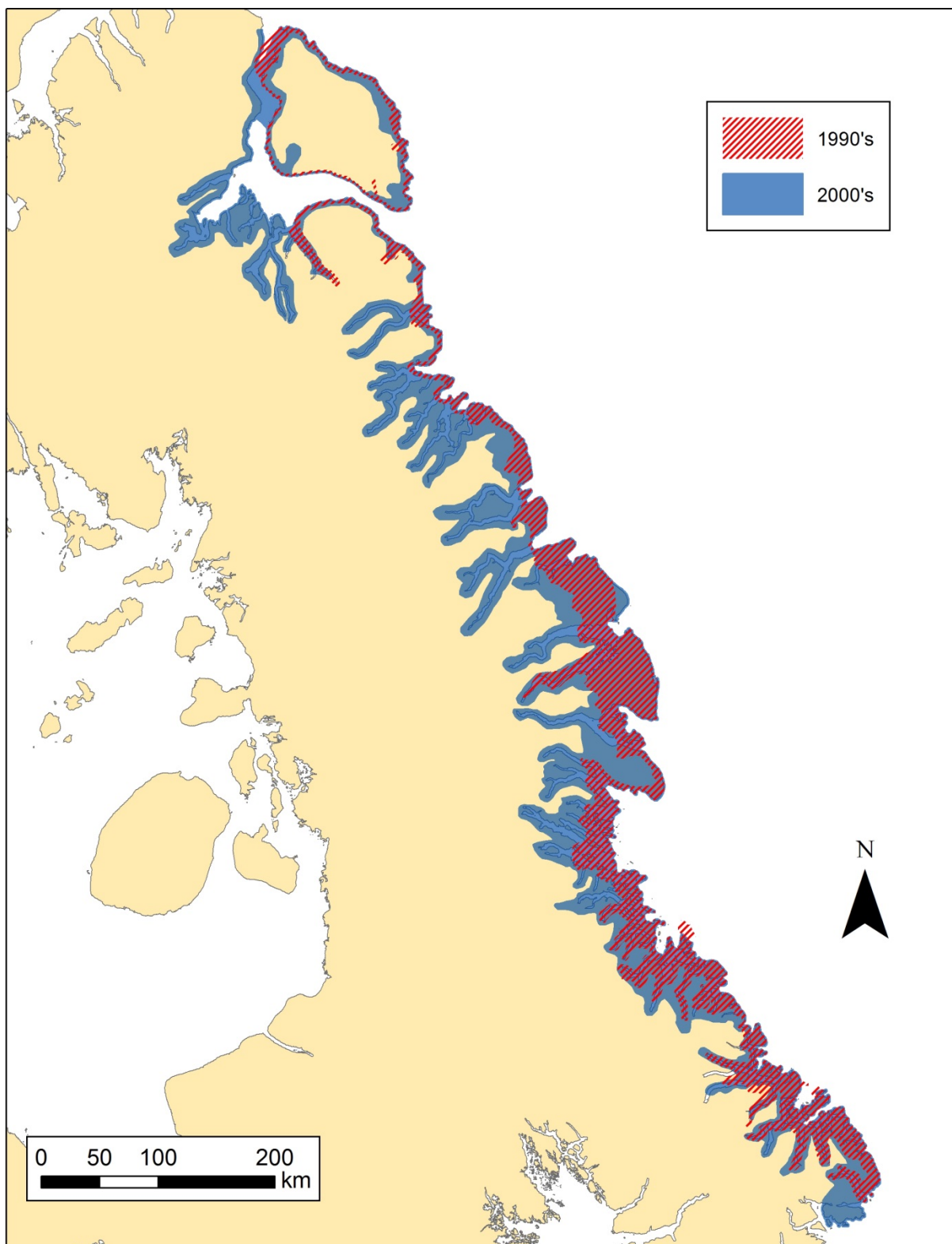


**Figure 3.7.** The delineation of the sampled area shown with a red outline for the 2010s with biopsy locations collected during the MR sampling (2011-2013).



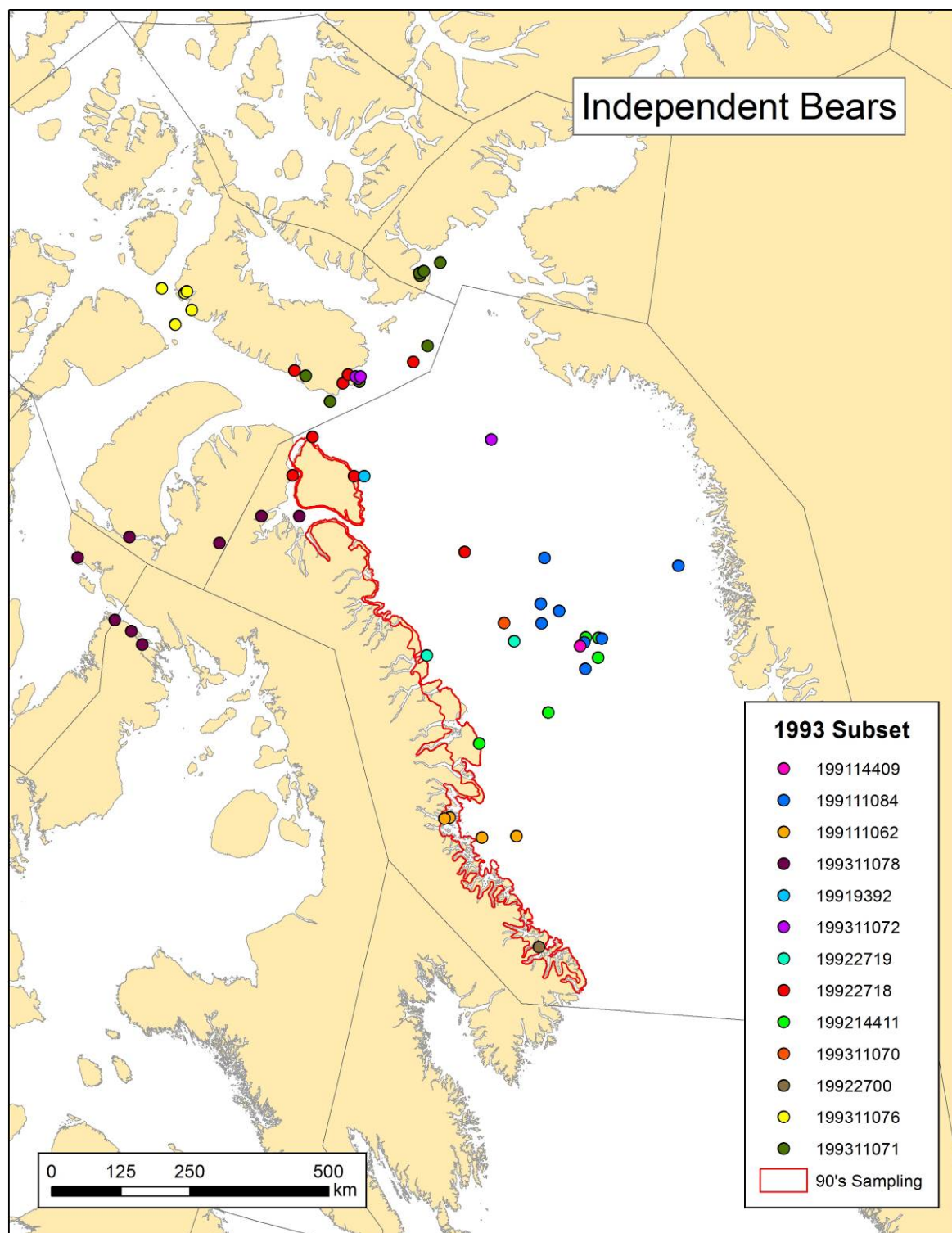


**Figure 3.8.** Geographic sampling ranges for the MR in the 1990s and 2010s.

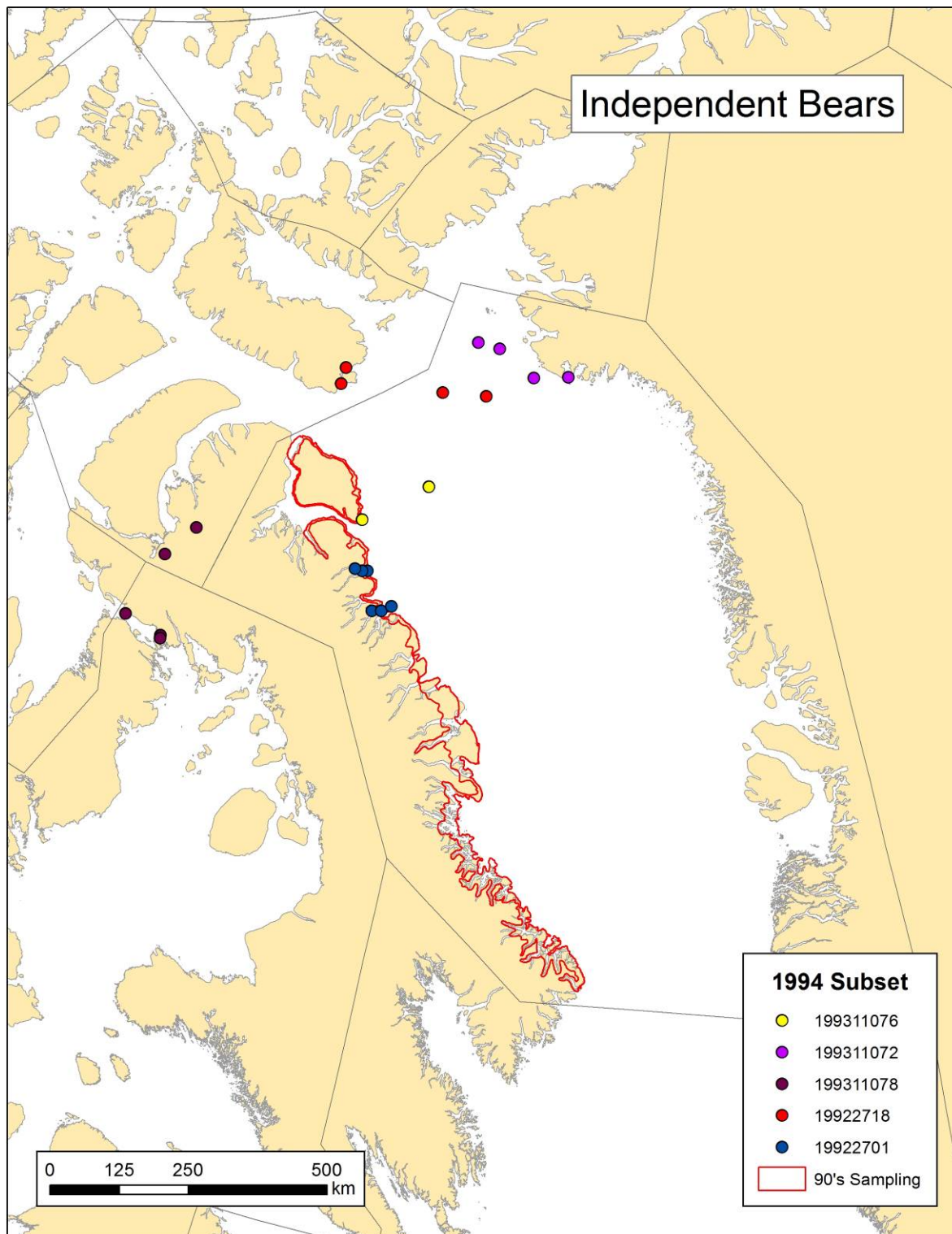




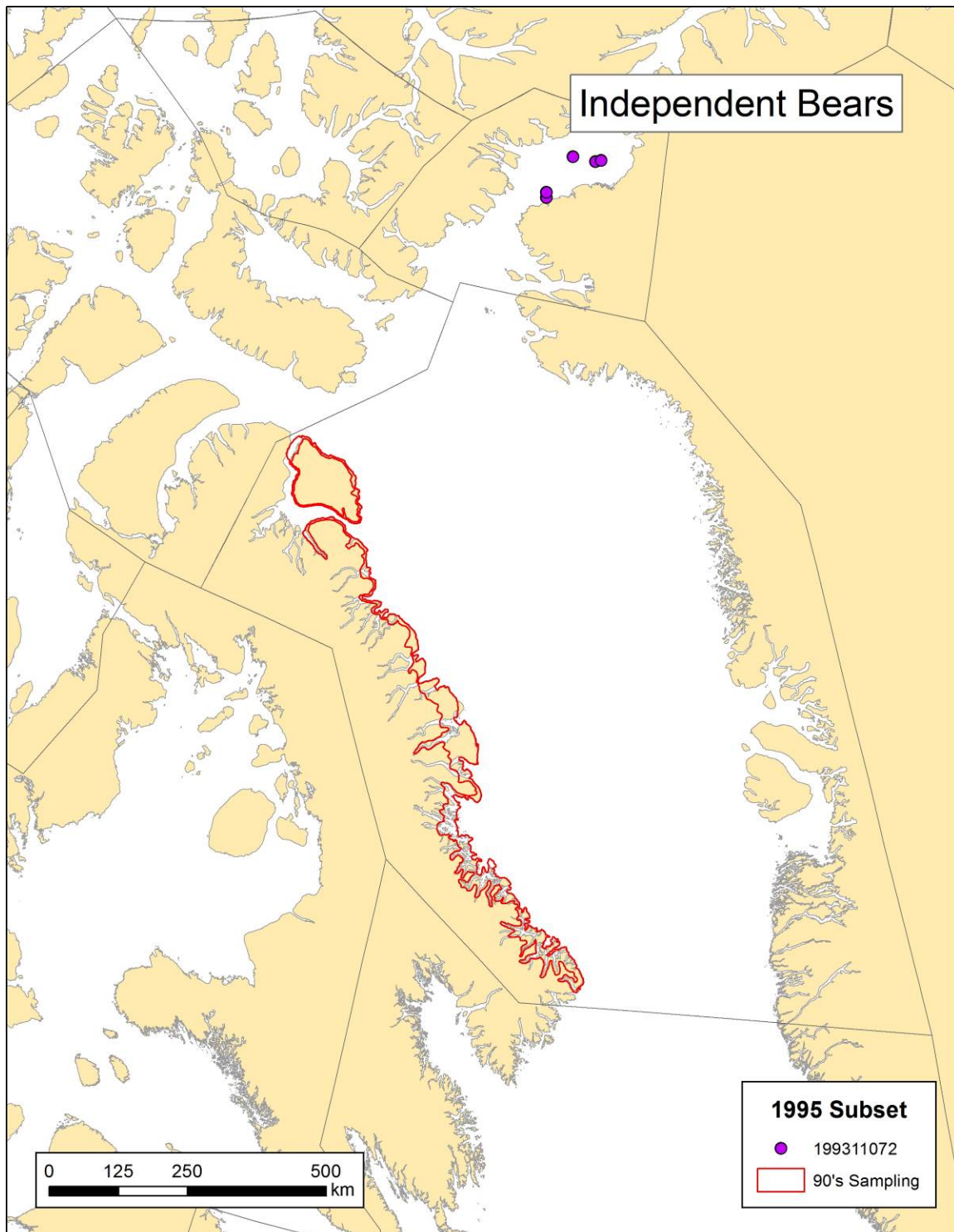
**Figure 3.9.** All telemetry locations from independent adult female bears with satellite collars transmitting during the 1993 sampling period dates (See Table 3.3). The 1990s sampled area for the MR study is shown in the red outline. Bears in central BB are on sea ice (Figure 3.15).



**Figure 3.10.** All telemetry locations from independent adult female bears with satellite collars transmitting during the 1994 sampling period dates (See Table 3.3). The 1990s sampled area for the MR study is shown in the red outline.

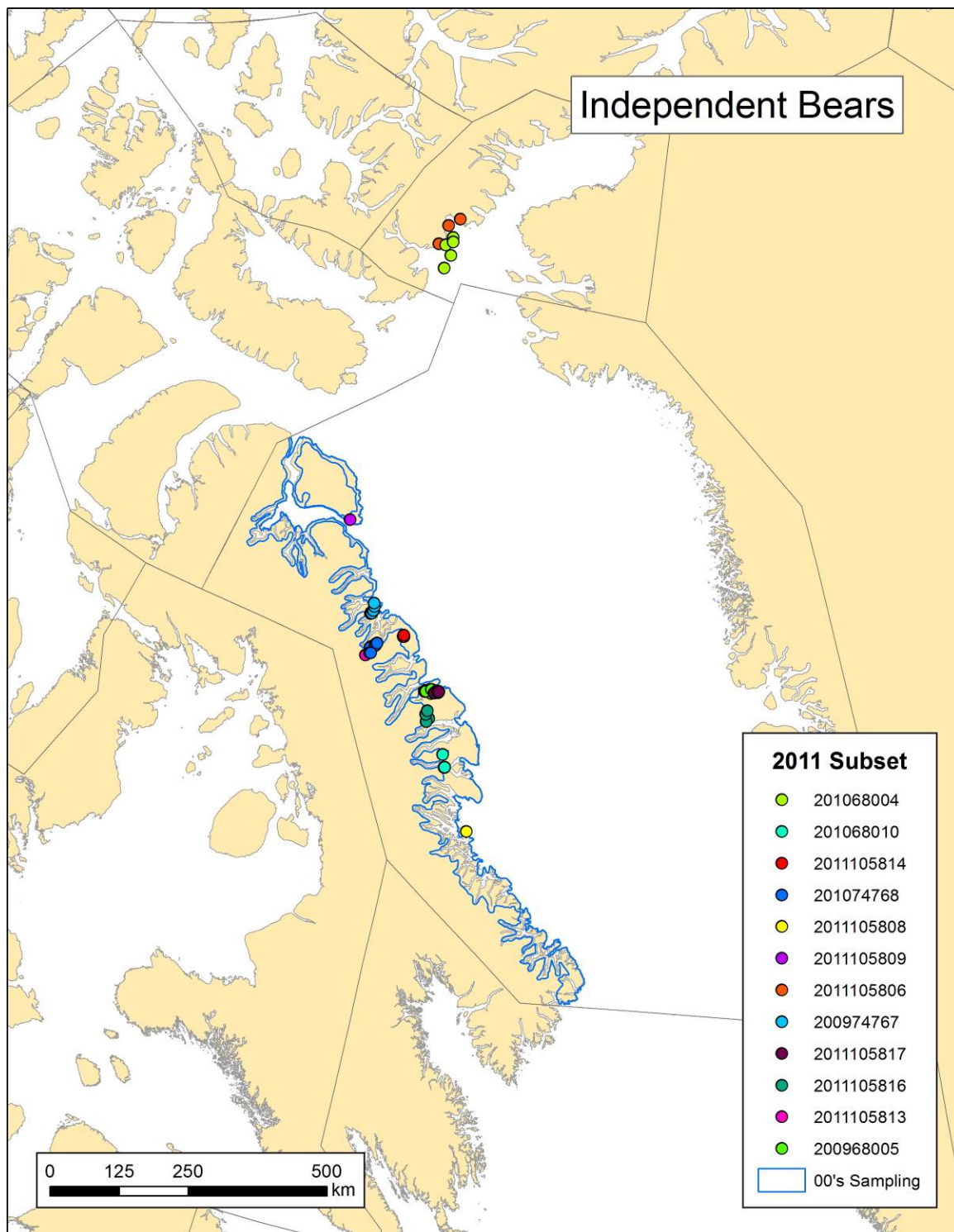


**Figure 3.11.** All telemetry locations from independent adult female bears with satellite collars transmitting during the 1995 sampling period dates (See Table 3.3). The 1990s sampled area for the MR study is shown in the red outline.

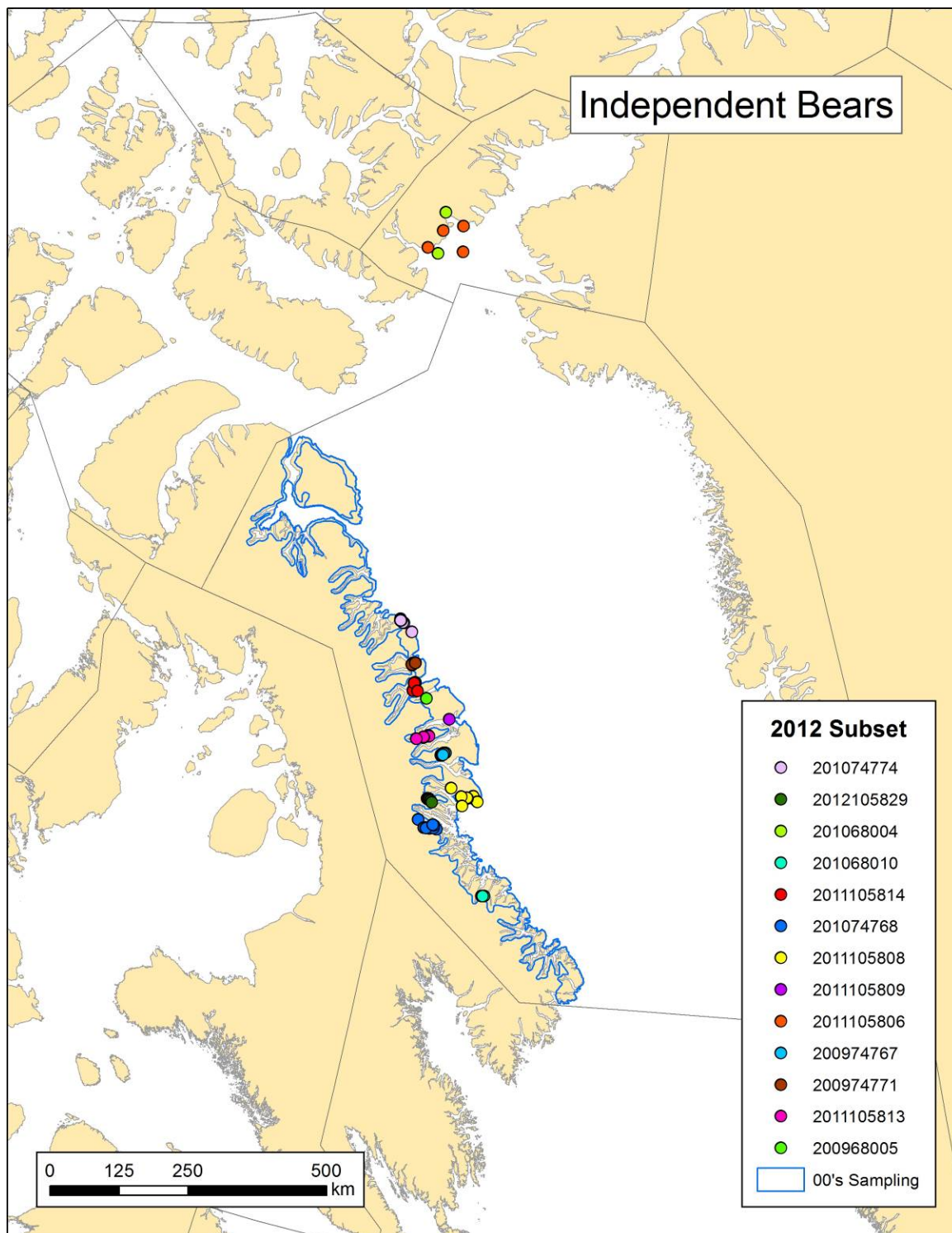




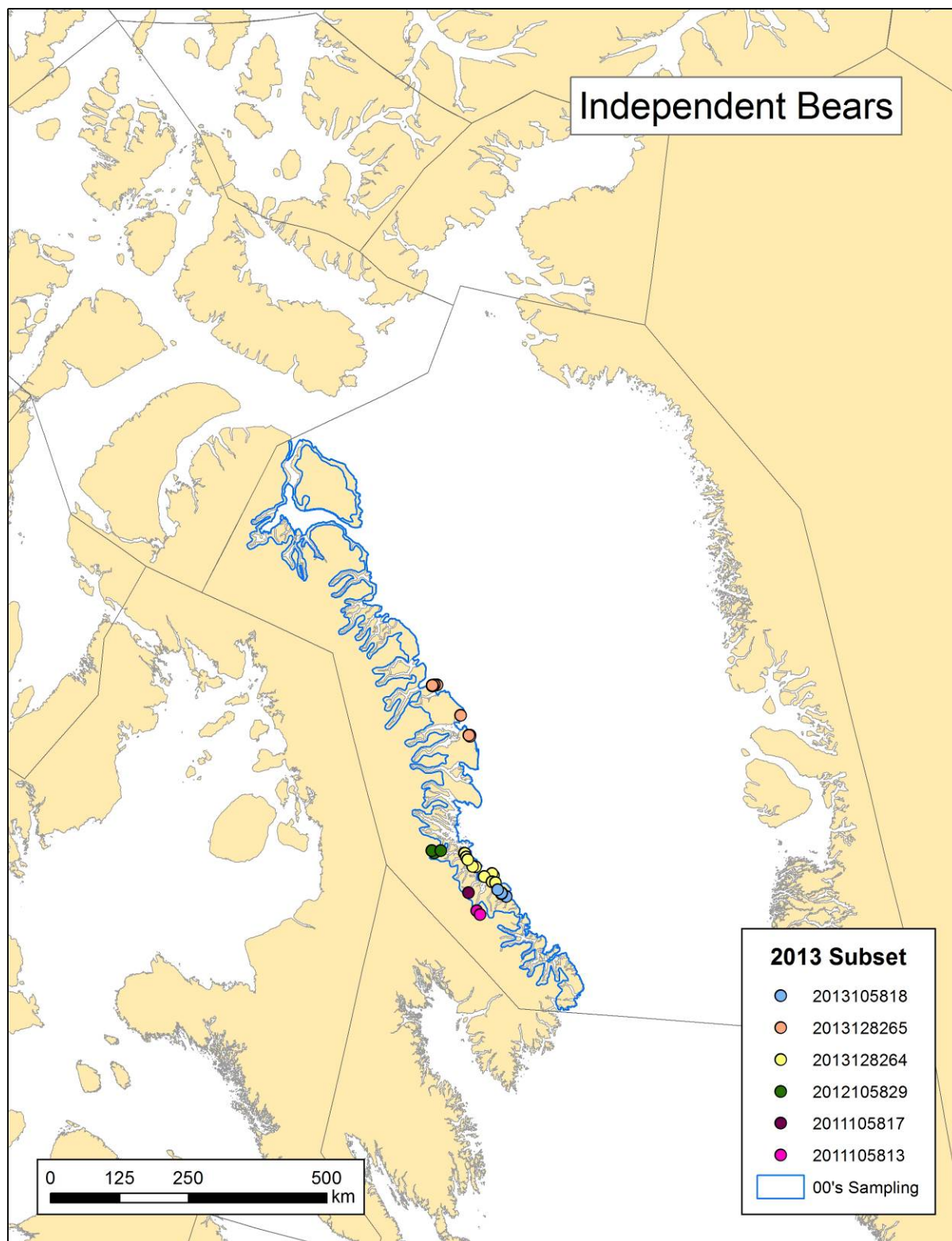
**Figure 3.12.** All telemetry locations from independent adult female bears with satellite collars transmitting during the 2011 sampling period dates (See Table 3.3). The 2010s sampled area for the MR study is shown in the blue outline.



**Figure 3.13.** All telemetry locations from independent adult female bears with satellite collars transmitting during the 2012 sampling period dates (See Table 3.3). The 2010s sampled area for the MR study is shown in the blue outline.

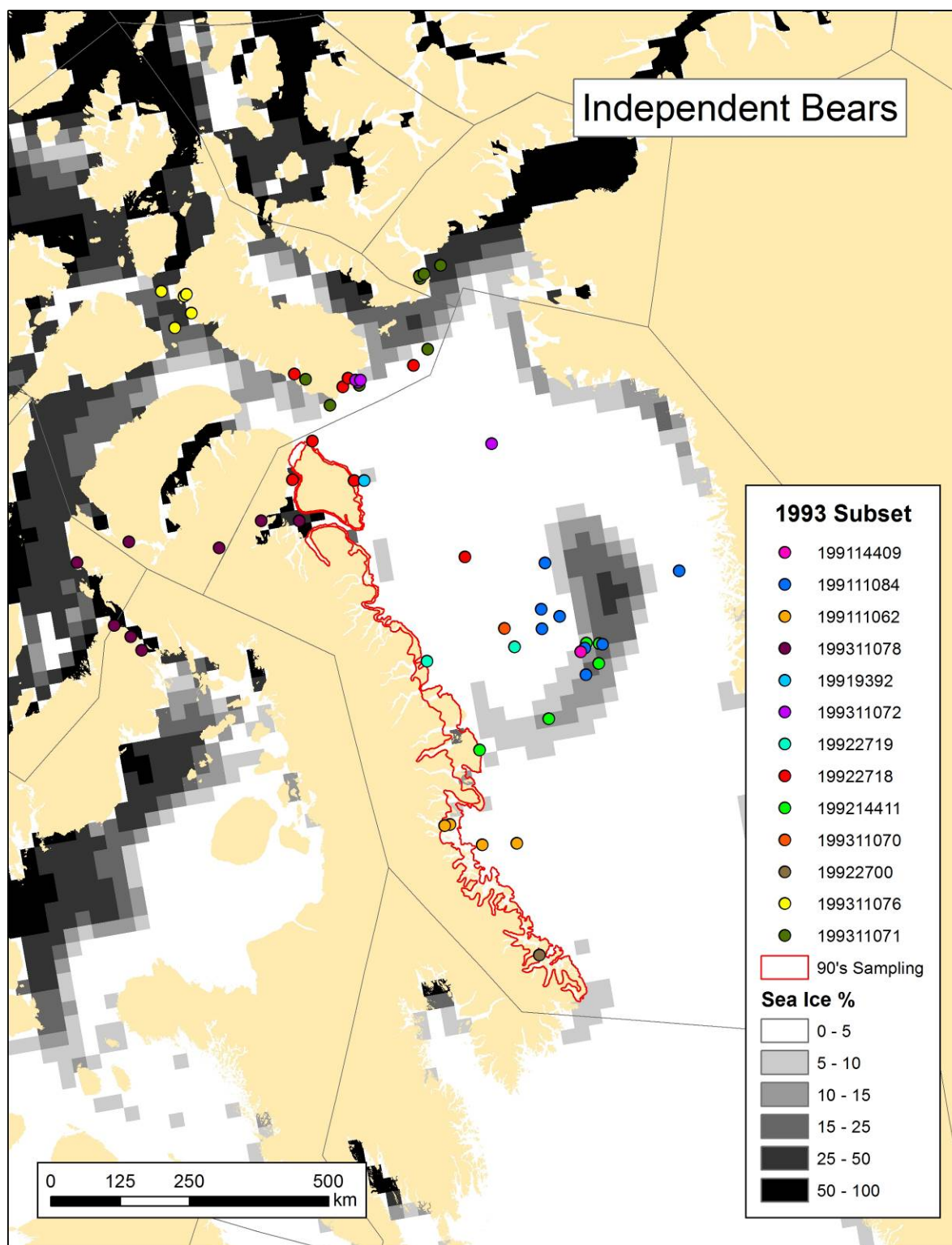


**Figure 3.14.** All telemetry locations from independent adult female bears with satellite collars transmitting during the 2013 sampling dates (See Table 3.3). The 2010s sampled area for the MR study is shown in the blue outline.

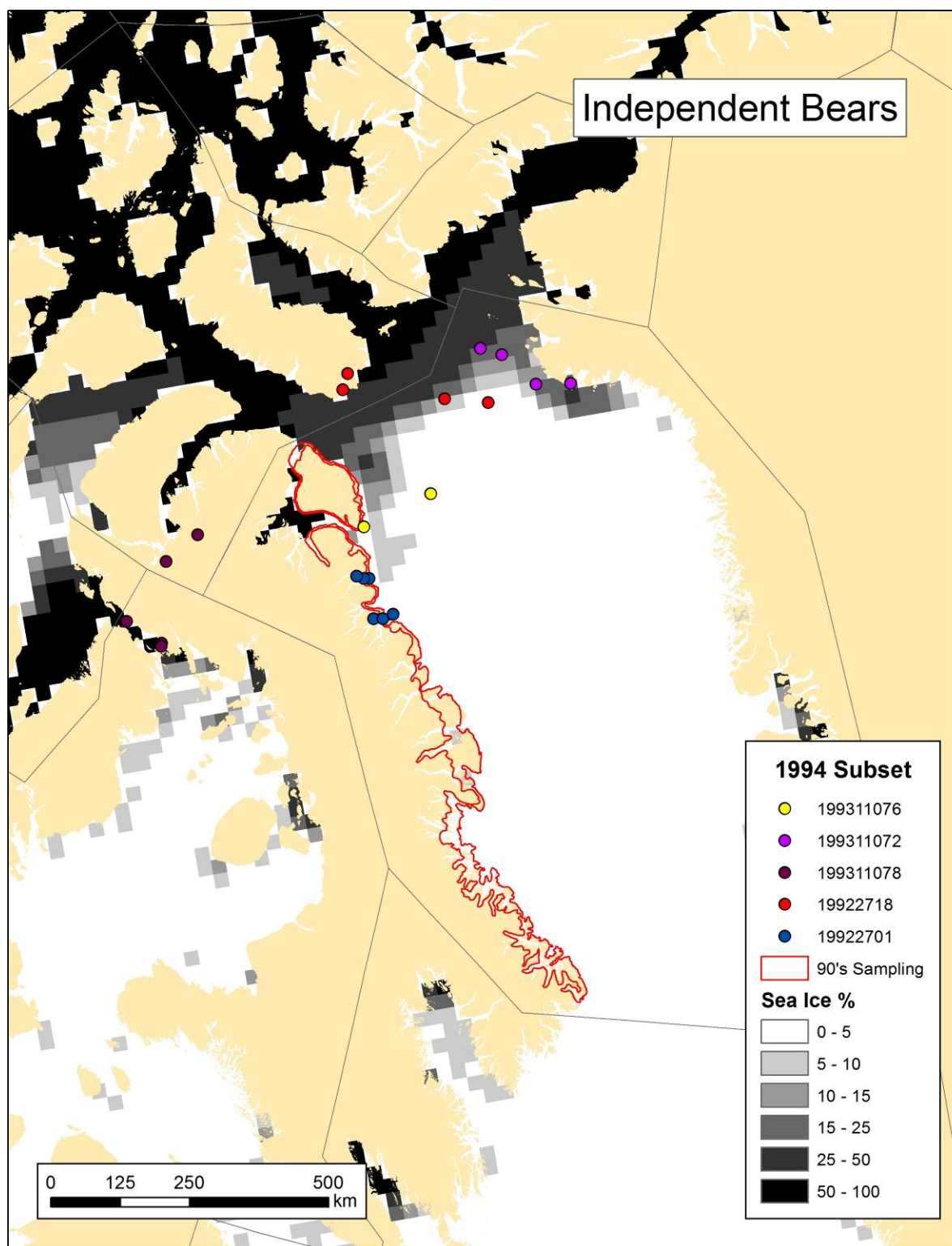




**Figure 3.15.** Distribution of weekly mean sea-ice concentrations (SSMI) during the mid-point of the sampling period in 1993 (August week 4). Sea ice is shown in 25 km<sup>2</sup> pixels. Locations of independent AF bears during the 1993 sampling period are shown.

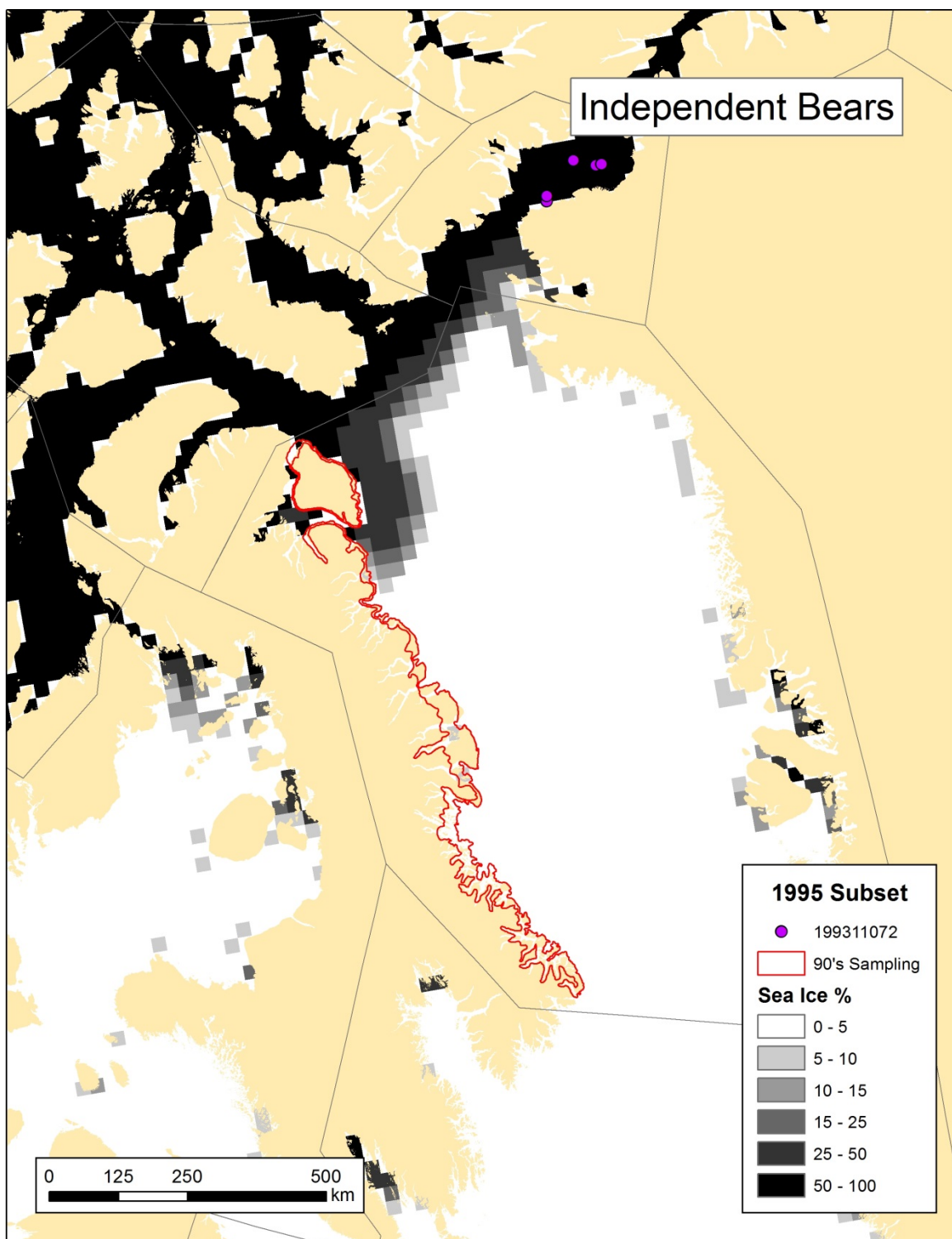


**Figure 3.16.** Distribution of weekly mean sea ice concentrations (SSMI) during the mid-point of the sampling period in 1994 (October week 1). Sea ice is shown in 25 km<sup>2</sup> pixels. Locations of independent AF bears during the 1994 sampling period are shown.



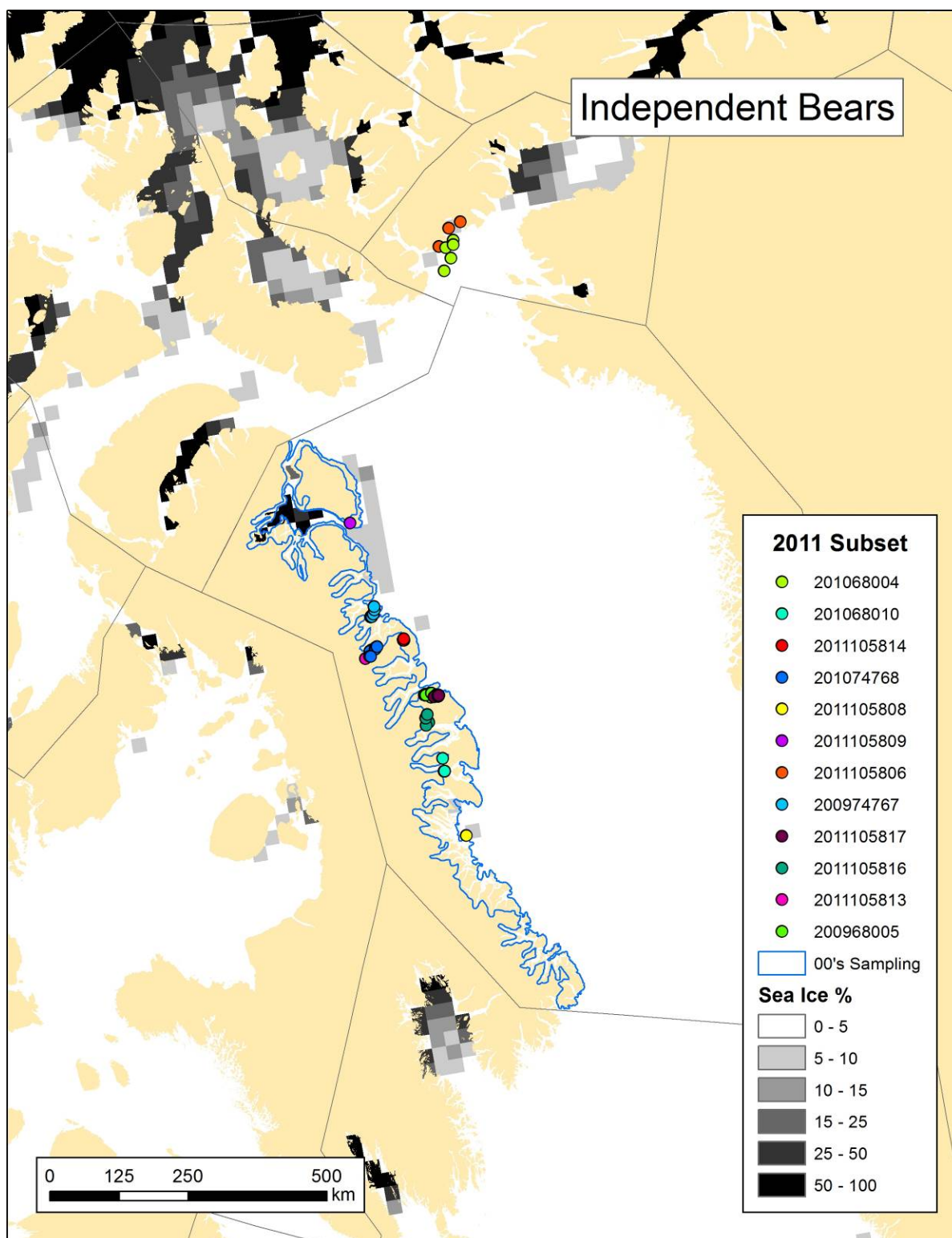


**Figure 3.17.** Distribution of weekly mean sea-ice concentrations (SSMI) during the mid-point of the sampling period in 1995 (October week 2). Sea ice is shown in 25 km<sup>2</sup> pixels. Locations of independent AF bears during the 1995 sampling period are shown.



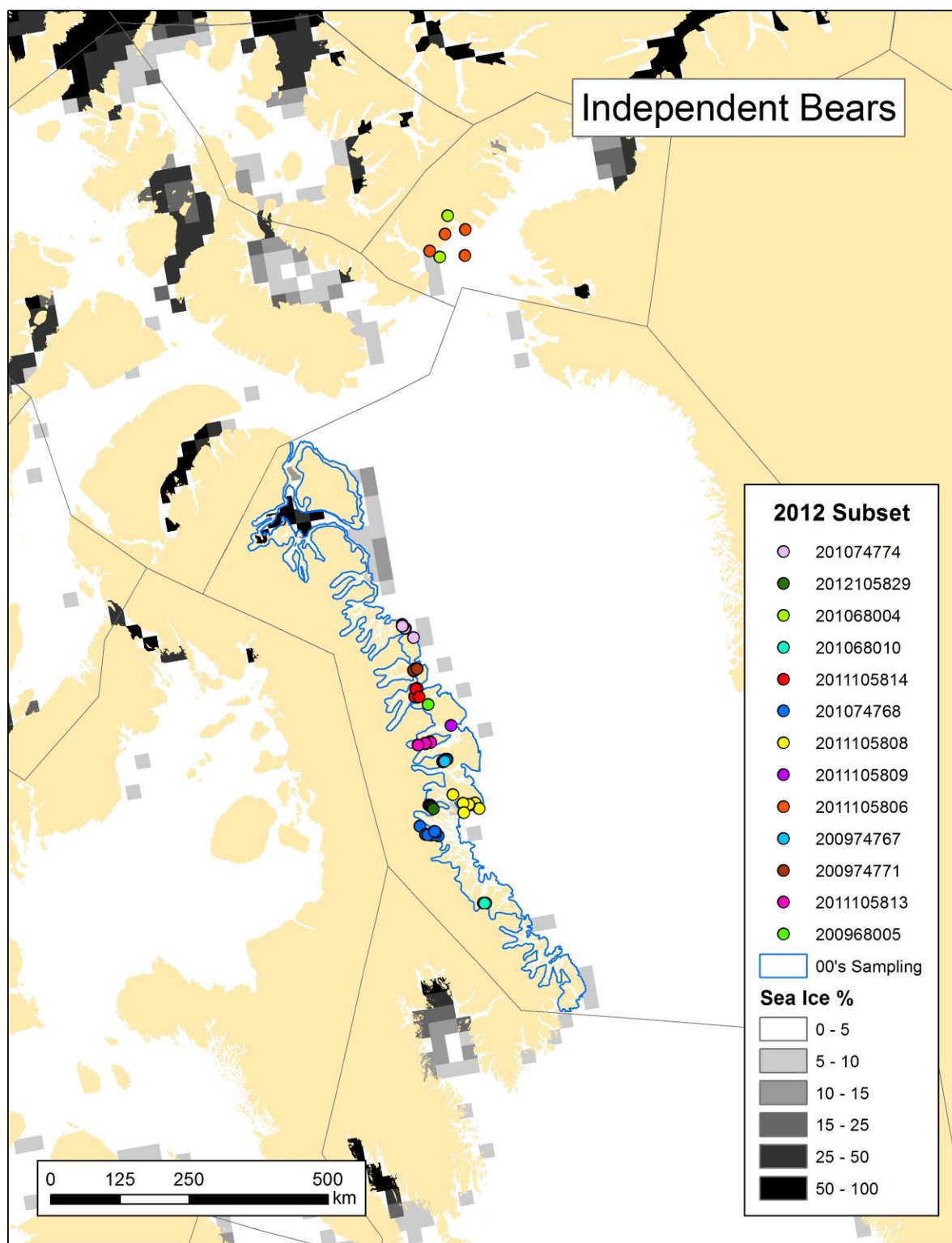
**Figure 3.18.** Distribution of weekly mean sea-ice concentrations (SSMI) during the mid-point of the sampling period in 2011 (September week 3). Sea ice is shown in 25 km<sup>2</sup> pixels.

Locations of independent AF bears during the 2011 sampling period are shown.



**Figure 3.19.** Distribution of weekly mean sea-ice concentrations (SSMI) during the mid-point of the sampling period in 2012 (September week 2). Sea ice is shown in 25 km<sup>2</sup> pixels.

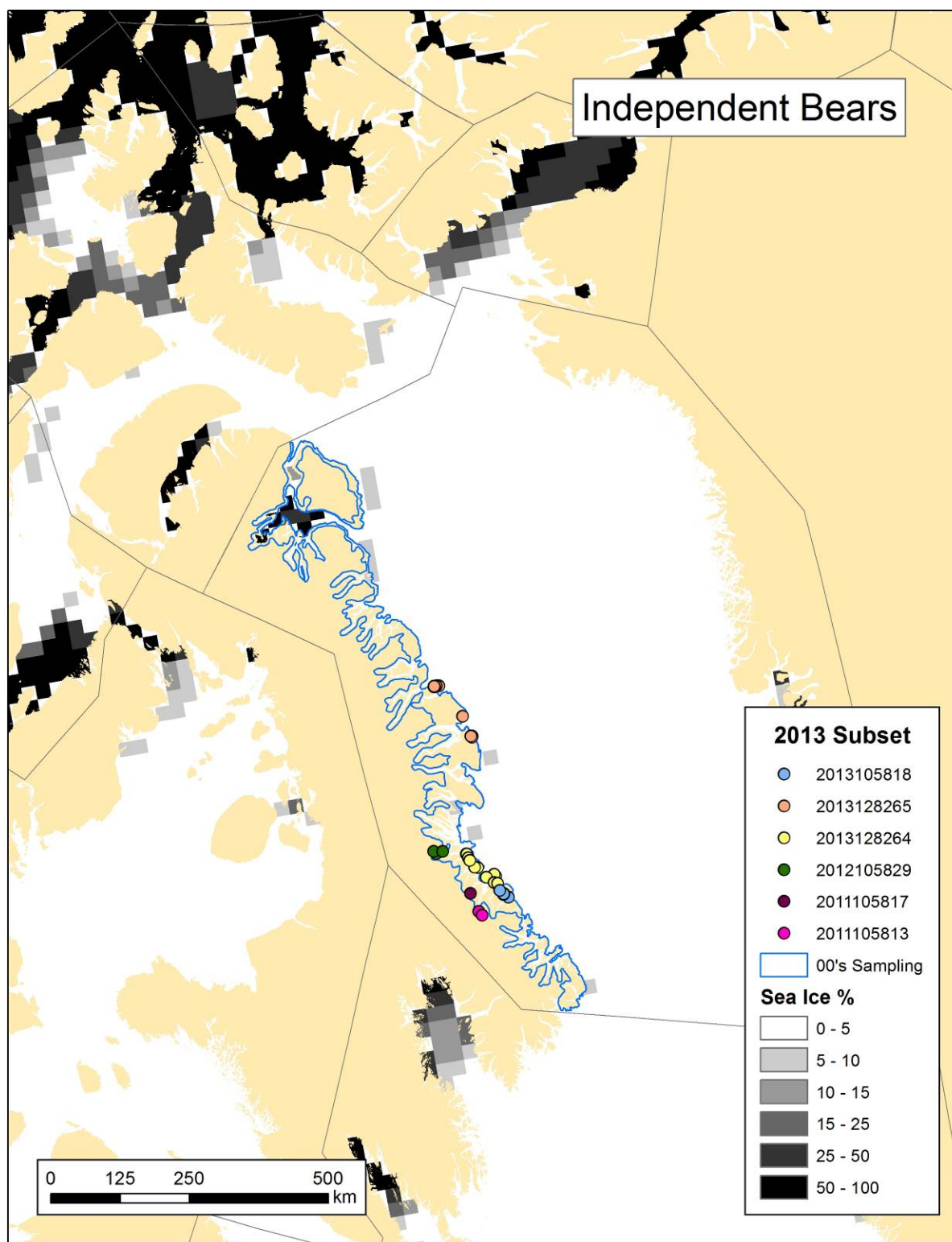
Locations of independent AF bears during the 2012 sampling period are shown.



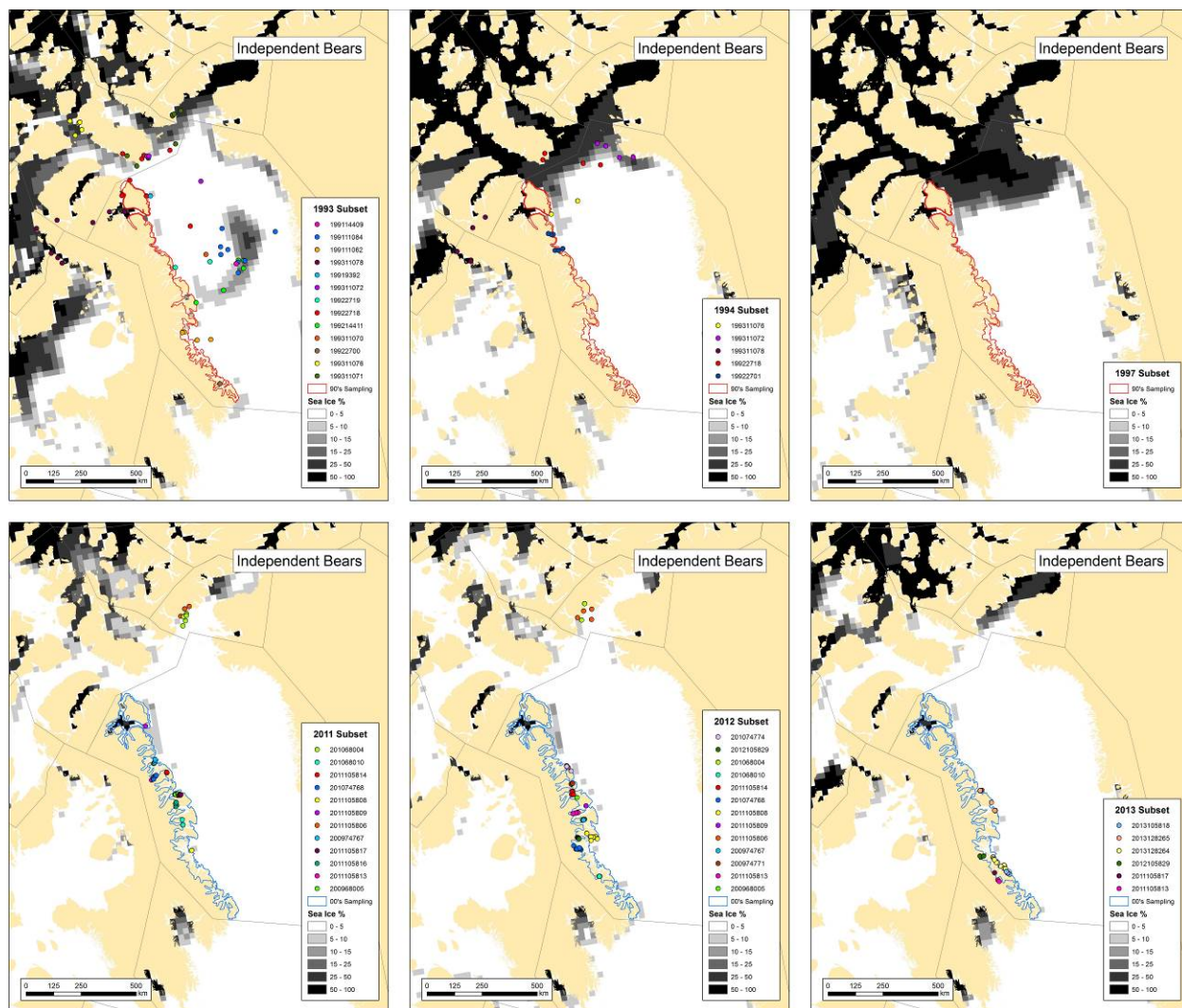


**Figure 3.20.** Distribution of weekly mean sea-ice concentrations (SSMI) during the mid-point of the sampling period in 2013 (September week 3). Sea ice is shown in 25 km<sup>2</sup> pixels.

Locations of independent AF bears during the 2013 sampling period are shown.



**Figure 3.21.** Distribution of sea-ice conditions (SSMI) during 1990s MR (top left to right 1993, 1994 and 1997) and 2010s MR (bottom left to right 2011, 2012, and 2013). Independent bears transmitting during the sampling are shown for reference. Note sampling occurred in 1997 but there were no independent collared bears for assessment of presence in the sampling area.



## CHAPTER 4

### HABITAT AND HABITAT USE IN BAFFIN BAY

#### KEY FINDINGS

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- Sea-ice habitat in BB has significantly declined over the period of satellite observations, especially since the mid-1990s. The length of summer (number of days from sea-ice retreat in spring to sea-ice advance in fall) is increasing by 12 days/decade. The mean sea-ice concentration during June-October is decreasing by 4 percent/decade. The general pattern of melt has not changed but occurs about 3-4 weeks earlier than in 1990s.
  - Four-day movement rates of adult female polar bears have significantly declined during summer (August-October) in the 2000s due to disappearance of offshore and archipelago summertime sea ice. Bears are significantly less likely to move from land onto sea ice in summer in the 2000s.
  - Bears use significantly lower sea-ice concentrations in winter and spring in the 2000s than the 1990s. Bears had stronger preferences to be closer to the 300 m depth contour (on shelf waters and near land) in the 2000s. Sea-ice concentration alone did not determine preferred habitat, adult females selected for lower sea-ice concentrations if it allowed them access to continental shelf waters (<300 m).
  - Adult female bears were significantly closer to land in all months in the 2000s except at the end of breakup (June-July), when they remained on offshore sea ice as long as possible to maximize feeding.
  - Potential long-distance swimming events were identified, defined as events in the summer during which bears traveled >100 km from offshore sea ice, to Baffin Island, through areas with <10% sea-ice concentration, and with a concurrent period of reduced or absent collar transmissions (i.e., because collars generally do not transmit when bears are in water). These events were observed in both decades, but the frequency increased in the 2000s, particularly in 2011.
  - Bears spend significantly more time on land on Baffin Island; arrival dates on Baffin Island in summer were one month earlier in 2000s. The amount of time bears spend on land has increased by 20-30 days since the 1990s. Bears in the 2000s no longer arrive on Devon or Ellesmere Islands but only on Baffin Island (some also remain in Melville Bay Greenland).
  - Entry dates into maternity dens were >1 month later in the 2000s. Exit dates from maternity dens did not change. Overall there was a significantly shorter maternity den duration in the 2000s.
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- The first date of arrival on land by pregnant females was significantly earlier in the 2000s than the 1990s and bears spend more time onshore before entering maternity dens.
  - Maternity dens in the 2000s occurred at higher elevations and steeper slopes than maternity dens in the 1990s, likely due to reduced snow cover.
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#### 4.1. Introduction

Information on habitat can be used to facilitate subpopulation status assessment and harvest recommendations in the context of changes that are occurring in both available habitat and habitat use by polar bears. Habitat analyses can be used to evaluate polar bear distribution with respect to environmental variables, particularly ice conditions, topography and food availability or distribution (e.g., Ferguson et al. 1999, Durner et al. 2009, Wilson et al. 2014) and to inform subpopulation status relative to changes in environmental carrying capacity (Regehr et al. 2015). Using habitat information to identify key areas of use, or areas that will be critical in the future, is also important for conservation. Finally habitat studies can also be used to provide important context for interpreting both point estimates and trends in vital rates or MR results, which often have considerable bias and uncertainty. Large changes in sea-ice habitat for polar bears have occurred across all 19 subpopulations (Stern and Laidre, in review), particularly BB which occurs in the seasonal sea-ice ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008).

We assessed changes in sea-ice habitat for the BB subpopulation and used satellite telemetry data collected over two decades to assess changes in movement rates of bears, sea-ice habitat use, terrestrial habitat use, arrival and departure dates on/off land, and maternity denning. The results of this work provide important context for the MR results and add perspective on how environmental changes may explain observed results. They also provide scientific information which can potentially be used for comparison to observations from LEK studies,

including observations of increased densities of polar bears on land or closer to shore (and communities).

## **4.2. Methods**

### Sea ice Analysis

Methods are described in detail in Stern and Laidre (in review), however, are briefly reviewed here. We used daily satellite data of sea ice for the period 1979-2014 from the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, CO (Cavalieri et al. 1996, updated yearly) to examine seasonal patterns of sea ice and how they are changing over time. These products are designed to provide a consistent time series of sea-ice concentration (the fraction, or percentage, of ocean area covered by sea ice) spanning the coverage of several passive microwave instruments. The gridded data have a cell size of  $25 \times 25$  km. We used ETOPO1 for bathymetry, a 1 arc-minute global relief model of Earth's surface that integrates land topography and ocean bathymetry, built from numerous global and regional data sets (Amante and Eakins 2009). We averaged the ETOPO1 data over each 25-km grid cell to get the mean ocean depth for the cell, which we used to distinguish the continental shelf (less than 300 meters depth) from the deeper ocean. Baffin Bay consists of 1042 grid cells ( $656 \times 103$  km<sup>2</sup>); 28% have mean depth  $< 300$  m, 72% have mean depth  $> 300$  m. The shallow regions are located along the east coast of Baffin Island and the west coast of Greenland.

From the sea-ice concentration data, we calculated the daily area of sea ice for three sets of grid cells in Baffin Bay: (1) all ocean depths, (2) shallow depths only ( $< 300$  m), and (3) shallow depths ( $< 300$  m) along the coast of Baffin Island only. Figure 4.1 shows the seasonal cycle of sea ice area in Baffin Bay (all depths). We calculated the March average sea-ice area and the September average sea-ice area over all years (1979-2014), and defined a threshold (T)



to be halfway between the two averages. We then found the date each spring when the sea-ice area dropped below T on its way to the summer minimum, and the date each fall when the sea-ice area rose above T on its way to the winter maximum. We call these the dates of sea-ice retreat and advance, respectively. These dates were calculated for each year (1979-2014) for the three regions (all depths, shallow depths only, and shallow depths along Baffin Island only).

In addition to the dates of sea-ice retreat and advance, we calculated the number of days from retreat to advance (also called length of summer), and the mean sea-ice concentration during June through October. Finally, we calculated the number of ice-covered days per year at every grid cell in Baffin Bay. This is the number of days per year that the sea-ice concentration exceeds 15%.

#### Sea-ice Habitat Use and Resource Selection Models

Polar bears were tagged in Northwest Greenland on the fast and pack ice between mid-March and mid-April 2009-2013 in Baffin Bay as described in Chapter 2. A total of 91 bears were tagged with satellite transmitters in BB. Of these, 38 were AFs collared in BB. These data were combined with a historical data set of AFs captured and tracked in the 1990s. In BB, 1991-1995 43 collars were deployed on AFs, with the majority deployed during the ice free season in fall on Baffin Island (n=11 deployed in spring in NWG, of these n=9 transmitted long enough to be included in the analyses). Only bears captured within the BB subpopulation boundaries were included in the comparative analysis, as defined by PBSG (2010).

*Data filtering and sub-sampling* – Methods on data filtering and sub-sampling are described in Chapter 2. Data were divided into seasons included Spring (March – July, which included the peak of sea-ice coverage and initiation of sea-ice break-up), Summer (August –

October, which included the end of break-up and the on-land period) and Winter (November – February, which included the freeze-up period and time when bears went back out on the sea ice). Adult females were defined as  $\geq 5$  years old and adult males as  $\geq 6$  years old. Age group status as determined in the field was verified based on tooth analyses (Table 4.1).

*Movement rates* – We examined daily (4- or 5-day) movement rates for AFs in each subpopulation by decade and month. For the RSF, we used the mean monthly movement rate + 2SD for the radius of potential habitat selection at each time step, following the approach used by Durner et al. (2009) and Laidre et al. (2015). We used monthly values that were specific to each decade. We used a spatial distance limit of 400 km (or roughly 12 days) as the maximum step length possible in the data. Any gaps longer than that were skipped.

*Habitat covariates for RSF* – In the comparative analysis between polar bears tracked in the 1990s and 2000s daily sea-ice concentration values were used from satellite passive microwave data (SSM/I) from Nimbus-7 SMMR and DMSP SSM/I-SSMIS Passive Microwave Data (Cavalieri et al. 1996) available from the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) in Boulder, Colorado, USA. Sea-ice concentrations were provided in a polar stereographic projection with a nominal grid cell size of  $25 \times 25$  km. Temporal coverage was every other day from 26 October 1978 through 9 July 1987, and daily through 01 April 2015. Sea-ice habitat was defined around each polar bear location at two spatial scales: the sea-ice concentration pixel value where the bear was located and the mean sea-ice concentration within a region consisting of the  $3 \times 3$  block of pixels centered at the bear location (nominal area  $5,625 \text{ km}^2$ ) with the corners removed in order to approximate a circle. All denning periods were identified (maternity and shelter dens) (Escajeda 2016) and removed from resource selection (RSF) models. RSF

models were only conducted on AFs to enable comparison with the 1990s. Bears with a low  $n$  (less than 3 locations) were removed from the analysis.

We also calculated the distance from each polar bear location to the sea-ice edge (defined with two concentration thresholds) and the distance from each polar bear location to the mainland Baffin Island coastline. The sea-ice edge covariate estimated the distance (in km) from the bear's location to the center of the nearest pixel with either 15% or 50% sea-ice concentration. We used the 15% sea-ice concentration as a delimiter between sea ice and open water. We used the 50% sea-ice concentration as a delimiter between suitable polar bear habitat and breakup conditions (see Stirling and Parkinson 2006). Distances were determined by great circle calculations based on latitude and longitude and therefore were not subject to pixel size.

We included variables about bathymetry in the models. We used IBCAO 3.0 (500 m<sup>2</sup>) to estimate the depth value (m) at the bear location and to determine if the bear was in categorical depth categories (shelf: 0 - <300 m, intermediate: 300 - 1000 m, and basin: >1000). We also calculated the distance of the bear to the shelf break (where the shelf break was considered to be > 300 m). In 931 cases (out of 500,000) at the southern extent of the range offshore in Davis Strait, there were no values in the IBCAO grid south of 60°N. For these values we used the ETOPO-5 grid (1 km<sup>2</sup>) to retrieve depth information. Finally we included a variable that quantified if bears moved from sea-ice in winter or spring to land.

Buffers were created around each polar bear location that were representative of available habitat bears could select on a 4-day (or occasionally 5 or 6-day) interval depending on satellite collar duty cycle (cycling of transmissions for battery longevity). The radius of the buffer was based on mean monthly movement rates for bears grouped into decades +2 SD (1990s and 2000s). Fifty random locations in each buffer were sampled for each time step and represented

candidate locations not selected by the bear at each given movement step (i.e., pseudo-absence locations). This control data set was considered to represent local habitat availability. All pseudo-absence locations were linked to the same habitat variables listed above using ArcGIS (ArcGIS 10.1, ESRI, Redlands, CA, USA). A maximum time gap of 12 days or 400 km distance was selected between locations to minimize the size of the buffer.

*RSF sea-ice models* – Univariate habitat utilization was quantified and contrasted for each habitat covariate (e.g, only pixels where the bear was present) in the 1990s and 2000s. Multivariate conditional logistic RSF models were built for each season and decade. We selected variables for multivariate analyses a priori based on biological hypotheses. We did not include variables in the same model that were biologically redundant (continuous depth vs. distance to 300 m shelf) or highly correlated (e.g., distance to 15% and 50% sea-ice concentration). Models were fit to each decade and one combined model using both decades was fit to facilitate testing for differences in effects across decades through the use of a covariate by decade interaction. We used conditional logistic regression with matched location/pseudo-absence sets (CLOGIT function from SURVIVAL package) (R Development Core Team 2013; Therneau 2015) to model the strength of preference for habitat parameters in the 1990s and 2000s.

#### Terrestrial Habitat Use and Selection

*Terrestrial RSF* – For collared polar bears on land in summer, RSF models included land covariates derived from two Digital Elevation Models (DEMs): the ASTER GDEM for all positions in Canada (<http://www.jspacesystems.or.jp/ersdac/GDEM/E/4.html>, 22 m2) and the GIMP for all positions in West Greenland (<http://bpcrc.osu.edu/gdg/data/gimpdem>). The

ASTER DEM, which was used for the majority of telemetry locations, consisted of a mosaic of tiles from the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer Global Digital Elevation Model (ASTER GDEM; Version 2), a product of Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The ASTER GDEM had an overall horizontal resolution of ~17 m at the 95% confidence interval with a vertical resolution of 75 m. The DEM was produced at a 22.625 x 22.625 m resolution with elevations positioned in the WGS 1984 datum and projected in a North Pole Stereographic projection with a central meridian of -55°W.

At all bear locations we extracted the value of elevation (m), slope (calculated as % rise) and aspect (calculated as 0-360 degrees) at the bear location using the DEM at the highest resolution. We included a variable that quantified whether bears moved from land habitats to sea ice in summer. We followed a similar process for the sea ice RSF models above but only examined land covariates in the summer season (August-October), including interactions for the 1990s and 2000s.

*Arrival and departure dates on land* – We used location data from satellite collars to compare the timing of land use patterns by AF polar bears in the Baffin Bay between two time periods (1991-1997 and 2009-2015) when substantial summer sea-ice loss occurred. We excluded bears that remained in Melville Bay for the entire tracking period (1-2 years) as these bears, though close to shore, were using glacial ice throughout the summer and we could not determine if they were on land or in a glacial mélange. We quantified the date individual BB bears arrived on land in fall, the duration of time spent on land, the date bears were back on the sea ice in spring.

All radio-collar locations were determined by the Argos System with accuracy from < 250 m to > 1500 m (see <http://www.argos-system.org/web/en/78-faq.php#faq-theme-55>).

Location data were filtered to remove implausible locations as described previously. Instances of dropped collars were identified based on activity and temperature sensors and data collected post-drop were removed.

We considered a bear to be on land if its Argos location was within 5 km of the high resolution coastline as identified by 0-pleth line of the IBCAO digital elevation model (Jakobsson et al. 2012). The 5 km buffer was used to encompass small barrier islands that may be used by polar bears in the summer but are not depicted as land in the GIS file and to account for low accuracy of some locations. Our 5 km buffer might have resulted in some offshore bears being classified as on land, but this was less likely to occur during the focal time periods of our analysis (fall and spring) because landfast ice was either disappearing or forming in the seasonal ice zone. We were most interested in the date bears arrived on land during the fall sea-ice recession and the date bears returned to the ice during spring ice formation. Thus any short-term visits to land were not included in the analysis and we focused on large seasonal patterns. Due to the nature of the sea ice cycle in BB, bears within 5 km of the coast during fall were likely to either have been in open water or on land.

Bears were required to enter the 5 km buffer and stay within 5 km or less of the coastline for at least 14 days before they were considered to be 'on land'. The same criteria were used for bears departing from land in spring ( $\geq 14$  days on the ice). For all AF bears identified to be in maternity dens (Escajeda 2016), we excluded dates of return to the sea ice in spring, as the maternity denning period dictated the date of return, not the formation of sea ice.

For pairs of positions that were separated by 4 or 8 days, we linearly interpolated the date on or offshore. We excluded data when observed locations were separated by >8 days, except in the case of when bears were offshore in summer on <15% sea ice (>100-200 km from the nearest coastline) and next subsequent position was on land. In these cases, there were data gaps (12-30 days) in locations due to potential long distance swimming from central Baffin Bay to the shore; see next section.

*Potential swimming events* – We identified potential long distance swimming events from central BB during the break-up season. There are frequent drop-outs in transmission from collars (i.e., missing positions) such that the sampling interval was 8 days, or 12 days, or longer. The drop-outs occurred when the bear was in a region of extremely low sea-ice concentration, suggesting that the failure to transmit a position may be because the antennae is in the water, i.e., the bear was swimming (Pagano et al. 2012).

For every polar bear location, we extracted the sea-ice concentration at the SSM/I grid cell in which the polar bear was located providing a time series of sea-ice concentration following the bear's trajectory. We also calculated the distance from every polar bear position to the nearest coastline and developed plot distance-to-land vs. time, using symbols representing the sea-ice concentration at the bear position. We examined the trajectory of each bear and identified the timing and occurrence of gaps in collar transmissions. We selected bears where the transmissions ceased during the break-up season when the bear was offshore and examined both the bear's trajectory and the sea-ice conditions for potential swimming to land.

*Maternity denning* – Solitary females or females with two year-old cubs were considered candidates for denning the following winter after capture (Wiig 1998). All of the satellite collars in the 2000s provided temperature and motion data along with position coordinates.

Temperature was measured by a thermistor within the collar (Fischbach et al. 2007). Data collected on polar bear dens in the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin in the 1990s were originally published by Ferguson et al. (1997), and included 29 dens from Baffin Bay and 9 from Kane Basin. The 1990s data were obtained in the form of one position per day.

Although the reading from the collars is influenced by the animal's body temperature, the temperature reported by the collar is a general representation of the ambient temperature of the surrounding habitat (Harris et al. 1990). Temperature data were extracted from transmitters using the Telonics Data Converter software (Version 2.21; Telonics, Mesa, AZ). Position and temperature data for bears identified as denning candidates were examined from July to June of the following year. Only one best quality position and one temperature reading were used for each day. The designated position for each day was selected by choosing the first position with the best location quality score. The temperature reading for each day was selected by first removing any temperature points  $\geq 40^{\circ}\text{C}$  or  $\leq -40^{\circ}\text{C}$  which were considered outliers (Tchernova 2010), and calculating the average. Three variables signal that a female is in a den: high temperature readings compared to ambient air temperature (10 to  $40^{\circ}\text{C}$  warmer), constant position on land, and decreased quality and frequency of transmissions (Amstrup and Garner 1994; Messier et al. 1994; Wiig 1998; Fischbach et al. 2007). Temperature data were available for all Baffin Bay bears.

Since transmissions were received on a 4-day duty cycle, the position data were particularly coarse as points found within the denning period did not closely center on a single den position, but rather consisted of a cluster of points within a small area. The data for all adult females were examined for sustained high temperatures (greater than  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), decreased transmission quality and frequency, and a stationary position on land during the denning period



(September through March). We created a subset of the position data for each denning candidate during this time period and mapped the points in ArcMap v.10.1 (Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. [ESRI], Redlands, CA 2012). Individual point shapefiles were created from the identified subset for the three location quality categories: LQ 1, LQ 2, and LQ 3. A buffer was then drawn around each point with radii equivalent to the maximum error estimate for each LQ score (points with LQ 1 had a buffer of 1500 m, LQ 2: 500 m, LQ 3: 250 m). The mean center of the intersection of these buffers then defined the den position. The method provided a probable location for the den site based on the error estimate of the satellite telemetry positions during the denning period and is independent of the number of positions as well as any spatial outliers. Note that not all of the dens were determined using this method, some bears had sparse location data within the denning period and thus the den positions had to be determined using variants of the buffer method.

*Den Phenology Analyses* – Length of denning was used to distinguish maternity dens from shelter dens. Shelter dens were typically occupied for a short period of time (> 14 days to < 4 months) whereas females will typically remain in maternity dens for > 5 months (Messier et al. 1994). Though shelter dens were included in the den habitat characteristics analyses, they were excluded from the phenology analyses. In addition to denning duration, den entry and exit dates were compared to the 1990s data (Ferguson et al. 2000). The exit date for each den was established as the median date between the female's last transmission from the den and the first movement outside the den, indicated by a significant drop in temperature and movement away from the den site. Most of the entry dates for the 2000s dens were determined by creating a 1 km buffer around each den site and selecting the median date between the last date outside of the buffer and the first date inside the buffer. The entry date was verified by comparing the autumn

temperature data for each denning bear with temperature readings from a non-denning bear that same year to check for a difference of more than 10°C. The dates when the temperature readings diverged by  $\geq 10^{\circ}\text{C}$  were then compared to the entry dates determined by the position data. Both the den entry and exit dates were measured as day-of-year (DOY; Day #1 is 1 January), which we then used to calculate the denning duration in number of days (Messier et al. 1994; Wiig 1998; Ferguson et al. 2000).

We used two-sample Mann-Whitney U tests to test for differences between the entry/exit dates between the 1990s and 2000s datasets and duration spent in the dens without assuming normality. Additionally we tested for a correlation between den entry date and latitude using a Kendall's tau test. An alpha value of 0.05 was used for all statistical analyses.

*First Date on Land (FDOL) by pregnant females* – The date of entry onto land was determined for each bear entering a maternity den. Cherry et al. (2013) defined the first date on land (FDOL) as the date that the bear first came onto land without returning to the sea ice until freeze-up the following fall; we modified this for pregnant females to be the first date on land after which the bear did not return to the sea ice until she emerged in the spring. First dates on land for sheltering bears were also calculated, but not analyzed.

*Den Habitat Characteristics Analyses* – All den positions were imported into ArcMap and overlaid with the ASTER DEM of the study area. The elevation, aspect, and slope of each den site were extracted from the DEM while straight-line distance to the nearest shoreline was measured using a vector shapefile of Canada's coastline (US Defense Mapping Agency). Elevation was calculated as the elevation of the cell containing the den site and was measured in meters. Aspect is the compass direction (in degrees) the cell faces, while slope measures the rate of maximum change of elevation in degrees.

A principal component analysis (PCA) using a correlation matrix was performed on the habitat data of the maternity dens in order to determine which variables drive any dissimilarity among den sites. In the data matrix for the PCA, each den site was input with its elevation, aspect, slope, and distance to coast. A second matrix organized the den sites into two groups: sample period (1990s or 2000s), and latitude zone (south of 70° N, central 70° N to 75° N, and north > 75° N). Prior to the analyses, the environmental variables in each dataset were log10-transformed to control for skewed data (Kenkel 2006). After computing the PCA, a Monte Carlo randomized approach was used to test the significance of the eigenvalues ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). All analyses were performed using the statistical software R version 3.0.2 along with the “vegan” package (Oksanen et al. 2013) and the “Biostats” R package (McGarigal 2015).

In order to test for differences in environmental descriptors between the two groups, a permutational multivariate analysis of variance (perMANOVA) was performed on the maternity den matrix. For the distance matrices, Euclidean distances were calculated for each log10-transformed and column-standardized matrix of raw data. A permutation test was then used to evaluate the significance of the resulting pseudo-F statistic as compared to a null hypothesis of no difference between groups. To determine the source(s) of dissimilarity detected by the perMANOVA, we applied a supplementary test of multivariate homogeneity of group dispersion (DISPER; Anderson 2006). DISPER involves computation of the distance of each group member to the group’s centroid and applies an ANOVA to the distances with a null hypothesis of no difference in variation among groups.

### **4.3. Results**

#### Sea-ice Habitat

In Baffin Bay, sea ice is retreating earlier in spring by 7 days/decade and advancing later in fall by 5 days/decade (Figure 4.2). Trends in four of the sea-ice metrics (Table 4.2) show consistent loss of polar bear habitat. The length of summer (number of days from retreat to advance) is increasing by 12 days/decade, and the mean sea-ice concentration during June–October is decreasing by 4 percent/decade (Figure 4.3). All these trends are statistically significant (Table 4.2).

Trends in the dates of spring sea-ice retreat and fall sea-ice advance are stronger for the shallow depths (< 300 m) than for all depths collectively. When only the shallow depths on the Baffin Island shelf are considered, the trends are weaker than for all depths collectively, which suggests that the trends are stronger for the West Greenland shelf than for the entire Baffin Bay. This can be seen in the trend in the number of ice-covered days (Figure 4.4), which shows a greater loss of ice-covered days along the western coast of Greenland than in central Baffin Bay.

The pattern of spring sea-ice retreat in Baffin Bay begins with melting along the southwest coast of Greenland and progresses northward. At the same time, the North Water Polynya (located at the north end of the Baffin Bay region, in Smith Sound, and the south end of the Kane Basin region) begins to melt out. At some point during summer, these two open water areas connect as Melville Bay melts out, severing the continuous ice connection between Baffin Island and Greenland. The sea ice then continues to melt back toward the coast of Baffin Island. Occasionally a “sea-ice island” becomes the last remnant of ice in Baffin Bay, if the ice along the coast of Baffin Island melts out first. This general pattern of melt has not changed over time, but it is occurring earlier in the summer now (in the last decade) than in the 1980s and 1990s (Figure 4.5). The early part of the melt pattern, up the coast of Greenland and across Melville Bay, is trending even earlier than the melt on the western side of Baffin Bay. In October and November,

sea ice advances southward through Baffin Bay, generally with the leading edge along the coast of Baffin Island. This pattern is occurring later in the fall now (in the last decade) than in the 1980s and 1990s (Figure 4.6).

In summary, the coast of Baffin Island is generally the last place in Baffin Bay to lose sea ice in summer, and the first place in Baffin Bay to regain sea ice in fall. The spring retreat of sea ice there is trending earlier by about 7 days/decade, or 24 days over the 3 ½ decades of this study. The fall advance of sea ice there is trending later by about 4 days/decade, or 14 days over the period of this study. During the months of June through October, the mean sea-ice concentration is trending downward by about 4% per decade, or about 14% over the period of this study. There is year-to-year variability in all the sea-ice metrics, but the trends are all statistically significant.

*Movement rates* – In Baffin Bay, mean monthly movement rates for adult females in the 1990s ranged from 5.5 km/day (in October) to 15.8 km/day (in December) (Figure 4.7). Rates for adult females in the 2000s ranged from 1.9 km/day (in September) to 13.8 km/day (in December) (Figure 4.8, Table 4.3). In general, rates were lowest in both decades during September and October, and highest in December. Adult females had significantly higher movement rates in the 1990s during May, August and September. In the summer months (Aug-Sept), movement rates in the 2000s were one-half to one-third of the rates in the 1990s ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 4.3). Overall there was also greater variability in movement rates in the 2000s than the 1990s, perhaps representing a broader range of strategies in changing habitats. The greatest variability was found in the early winter months, November and December, especially in the 2000s. This may represent changes in timing of freeze up and when bears access the sea ice.

*RSF sea-ice models* – We first examined univariate relationships for each covariate as a continuous function over the entire annual cycle (Figure 4.9 and 4.10). Adult female polar bears use significantly lower sea-ice concentrations in the 2000s than the 1990s in all seasons except May/June (Figure 4.9). Bears in the 2000s were also significant closer to land in all months except June and July. Overall there was a significantly smaller fraction of observations on the sea ice in the 2000s than the 1990s over the period that each bear was tracked (Figure 4.10).

In winter in the 1990s, the full multi-variate RSF model demonstrated a positive association between adult female polar bears and sea-ice concentration, meaning bears selected areas with higher sea-ice concentrations when available. The association in the 1990s with depth was negative, demonstrating preference for shallow shelf waters and avoidance of deep areas (Table 4.4). There was a strong negative association for movement on to land in winter. In the 2000s, preference for higher sea-ice concentrations was not as important as distance to shallow shelf waters. The distance to the 50% sea-ice concentration threshold was strongly negative, and adult females showed a strong and significant preference for regions <300 m in depth, similar to the 1990s. In both decades bears did not prefer to move from sea ice to land. Interactions between decades (changes in preference over time) showed that in winter adult female polar bears in the 2000s used lower sea-ice concentrations than bears did in the 1990s. In the 2000s there was also an increase in preference for being close to the 300 m depth contour (on shelf waters), which also serves as a proxy for distance to land.

In spring in the 1990s, the full multivariate model showed that adult females had a strong significant preference for higher sea-ice concentrations (Table 4.5), more so than in the winter months. There was also a negative association with increasing distance from 50% sea-ice concentration. This was similar to bears in the 2000s, where sea-ice concentration and distance

to 50% sea-ice concentration were important model variables. When the two decades were compared using interactions, the preference for high ice concentrations was significantly stronger in the 2000s than the 1990s. Furthermore, being farther from 50% ice concentration was less preferred in the 2000s than the 1990s (it was not preferred in either decade but more so in the 2000s). There was no change in the association with land, in both decades bears strongly avoided going to land in spring.

### Terrestrial Habitat Use and Selection

*Terrestrial RSF* – In summer both in the 1990s and 2000s, resource selection models suggested that adult female polar bears significantly preferred areas of lower elevation and steeper slope (Figure 4.11, Table 4.6). There was no preference for aspect. Also in both decades adult females showed a negative preference for being further inland from the outer (smoothed coast) of Baffin Island. In the 1990s there was a significant preference to stay on land (bears tended not move on to ice or into water). In the 2000s, all of the preferences were similar to the 1990s. There were no changes in preference between decades for on-land habitat types (elevation, slope, aspect or distance inland from the outer coast) (Figure 4.12). The primary difference between decades was that bears in the 2000s had a stronger preference to stay on land, meaning they were less likely to move to sea ice in summer months (once on land) than in the 1990s.

*Timing on land and duration on land* – We obtained 78 arrival dates for AF bears between 1991 and 2013. In some cases one bear contributed more than one arrival date because the bear was tracked over multiple years. Of these, bears arrived on land on Baffin Island (n=71 dates), Devon Island (n=5 dates) or Ellesmere Island (n=2 dates, in Kane Basin). We also obtained 71 departure dates in fall, of these 66 were from Baffin Island, Devon Island (n=3

dates) and Ellesmere Island (n=2 dates). We excluded the dates from two individual bears on Ellesmere Island because the sea-ice formation and break-up in the Arctic Archipelago system is different than the seasonal ecoregion in BB, which is the region of focus.

The mean date of arrival on land in the 1990s was August 24 (SD 16 days, n=30), which was significantly later than the mean date of arrival on land in the 2000s (August 4, SD 11 days, n=46) ( $p < 0.001$ ). The mean date of departure from land in the 1990s was November 1 (SD 21 days, n=42) which was not statistically different than the mean date of departure from land in the 2000s (November 8, SD 9 days, n=27) ( $p = 0.06$ ) (Table 4.7).

The overall mean arrival latitude in the 1990s was  $70.7^{\circ}$  N (SD 3.0, n=30), which was not statistically different than the overall mean latitude of arrival in the 2000s of  $70.3^{\circ}$  N (SD 1.3, n=46). The overall mean departure latitude in the 1990s was  $69.7^{\circ}$  N (SD 3.0, n=42) and was not statistically different than the overall mean latitude in the 2000s of  $70.4^{\circ}$  N (SD 1.4, n=27).

When latitude of arrival and departure was examined in 2 degree blocks, there was a clear difference between decades. In general the distribution of arrival and departure latitudes was more restricted in the 2000s than the 1990s (Figure 4.13). For example, bears in the 2000s had significantly earlier arrivals that were contracted into a smaller band of latitudes. In the 1990s, bears departed from a larger range of latitudes ( $75$  to  $67^{\circ}$  N), where as in the 2000s departures were condensed into a latitude band ranging from  $73$ - $68^{\circ}$  N. The departures showed the general pattern of sea-ice formation from north to south (so more northerly latitudes were available earlier) (Figure 4.14).

Estimation of time on land requires both an arrival and a departure of the same bear in the same year (paired dates). In this case we had n=14 pairs of dates in the 1990s and n=26 pairs of



dates in the 2000s. We used this to estimate the number of weeks spent on land and changes between decades. We did not include the two individuals on Ellesmere Island.

During the 1990s, the mean duration of time on land in summer was 62.3 days (SD 25, range 8-99 days). In the 2000s, the mean duration of time on land in summer was significantly longer ( $<0.001$ ) by 33 days, with an average time on land of 94.8 days (SD 15.7, range 56-120). These values include bears that used any coastline within the seasonal sea-ice ecoregion (e.g., including Devon Island, where bears arrived in the 1990s). If only bears using Baffin Island were compared then the mean duration of time on land in summer in the 1990s increased to 74.5 days (SD 14, range 54-99 days,  $n=10$  bears). This value was still significantly different when compared to the 2000s ( $<0.001$ ), with bears in the 2000s spending on average 20 days longer on land (Table 4.8).

The dates of adult females arrival and departure from land, described above, had a remarkably close correlation with the sea-ice metrics in BB (Figure 4.2 and 4.15). In both decades the dates of fall sea-ice advance were correlated and highly similar to the dates of departure from land. In both decades the dates of spring sea-ice retreat were correlated to the dates of arrival on land, however there was a lag between the retreat and arrival dates while bears used sea ice in BB as long as possible before being forced to land (Figure 4.15).

*Swimming to land* – There were potential long-distance swimming events observed both decades however they were observed in larger numbers in the 2000s. In the 1990s there were at least two potential long-distance swimming events. In the 2000s, there were 15 potential events in July 2011, one in July 2012, and one in July 2013. Examples of data time series from these events are shown in Figures 4.16 and 4.17. The events in July 2011 were especially prominent because in that year sea-ice breakup occurred early when a large number of bears ( $n=15$ ) were

transmitting from offshore BB. In this case, at least 6 bears appeared to swim to Baffin Island, where large gaps in locations occurred over a period of 2-3 weeks and then bears first transmission after the gaps was onshore on Baffin Island.

Additionally, in five cases events were identified where satellite collars were functioning normally and transmissions from individual bears ceased when the bear was in <10% sea ice and several hundred kilometers from shore. These events appeared to be the start of what would have been swimming events, though the bears never reappeared on shore. (See Figure 4.18abc for examples).

*Maternity denning* – Maternity denning is described in detail in Escajeda (2016). Overall we found 21 dens between 2009 and 2015, including 16 maternity dens (Figure 4.19) and five shelter dens (Figure 4.20). In the 1990s, Ferguson et al. (1997) found 29 dens between 1991 and 1997 including 8 maternity dens and 21 shelter dens (Table 4.9). All but one of the dens were located on land (one 1990s shelter den was located on landfast ice inside a fjord near the shore of Baffin Island). In the 2000s, most maternity dens were found on Baffin Island except for one den on Coburg Island and one den in Melville Bay, Greenland. The maternity den in Greenland was included in the phenology analyses but not the habitat characteristics analyses because of glacial ice. The lowest latitude for the 1990s dens was 66.4° N, and 67.5° N for the 2000s dens.

Among the three bears that built maternity dens twice in our dataset only one exhibited fidelity to a maternity denning area. The bear built a den in 2012 that was 1.25 km away from her previous denning site in 2009 on a peninsula close to Eglinton Fjord, Baffin Island. The other females denned in areas far from previous den sites and showed no fidelity. Also, one female built two maternity dens in consecutive years (2011 and 2012).

The majority of maternity dens were found on a north-facing slope ( $n = 21$ ) and were located within 21 km of the coast (Table 4.10). All of the maternity dens were located further inland than shelter dens, on average 8.5 km from the coast in comparison to 6 km among shelter dens. The maternity dens were also located at higher elevations ( $\bar{x} = 524.2$  m) in comparison to shelter dens ( $\bar{x} = 395.7$  m) ( $p = 0.086$ ). One bear denned a little less than 35 km away from Qikiqtarjuaq, Baffin Island, Canada, however most bears denned far from human settlements ( $\bar{x} = 143.1$  km).

Adult female polar bears in BB in the 2000s spent on average less time in their dens ( $\bar{x} = 167.1$  days,  $SD = 27.6$  days) than in the 1990s ( $\bar{x} = 194.1$  days,  $SD = 21$  days; Table 4.11). There was a significant difference in den duration between the two time periods with a  $p$ -value of 0.017 (Figure 4.21). Timing of entry in the dens differed significantly among the two periods ( $p = 0.018$ ), however no significant difference was found among exit dates ( $p = 0.399$ ; Figure 4.22). The median entry date for dens in the 2000s dataset (3 October) was more than a full month later than the median date of entry for dens in the 1990s (28 August). Therefore, differences in entry dates accounted for the observed difference in duration among the two time periods. There was no significant correlation between latitude and den entry ( $p = 0.383$ ) and exit dates ( $p = 0.212$ ) for the Baffin Bay maternity dens, and the negative correlation of den duration with latitude was not significant ( $p = 0.278$ ) (Table 4.11).

The dates of entry onto land in the 2000s significantly differed from the 1990s. The median first date on land among the Baffin Bay maternity denning bears was 7 August in the 2000s ( $SD = 9.1$  days) compared to 25 August in the 1990s ( $SD = 19$  days) (Figure 4.23). This follows well with the results examining first date on land for all collared females in BB, not just those that build maternity dens in fall.

The elevation and slope significantly differed between the 1990s and 2000s maternity dens ( $p = 0.003$ ; Table 4.12). There were more dens at mid to high elevations and steeper slopes in the 2000s than in the 1990s (Figure 4.11). The average elevation and slope among the 2000s Baffin Bay maternity dens (elevation:  $\bar{x} = 707$  m,  $SD = 285$ ; slope:  $\bar{x} = 23.1^\circ$ ,  $SD = 7.4$ ) was double that of the 1990s dens (elevation:  $\bar{x} = 351$  m,  $SD = 194.5$ ; slope:  $\bar{x} = 11.9^\circ$ ,  $SD = 6.4$ ). Although most dens were found at southern-facing aspects in the 2000s and most were found at northern-facing aspects in the 1990s (Figure 4.24), there was no significant difference between the two time periods ( $p = 0.392$ ). Females in BB maintained dens at similar distances to the coast between the two time periods.

The PCA ordination analysis on the Baffin Bay maternity dens matrix produced two principal components (PC) that together explained 65.69% of the variation (Table 4.13). The first component, PC 1, explained 37.31% of the variation and had strong loadings from elevation and slope (loadings  $> 0.6$  or  $< -0.6$  were considered significant; Table 4.13). PC 2 explained almost a third of the variation at 28.38% and was strongly loaded by aspect. We tested the statistical significance of the first four eigenvalues by applying a Monte Carlo randomization test and found both PC 1 ( $p = 0.455$ ) and PC 2 ( $p = 0.4$ ) to be insignificant. The perMANOVA analysis detected a significant difference between the habitat variables of the year groups ( $p = 0.003$ ), but not the latitudinal zone group ( $p = 0.775$ ).

Year groups were visualized in ordination space using a PCA biplot, with dispersion ellipses drawn around the year groups using the `ordiellipse` function from the “vegan” package (Figure 4.25). The ellipses are drawn around the standard deviations of the point scores, and the directions of their principal axes are defined by the weighted correlations (Oksanen et al. 2013). In the biplot, most of the 2000s maternity dens are positioned to the left of the plot whereas the

1990s dens are on the right. Since elevation and slope had the highest loadings for PC 1 and were both negative, the dens in the left half of the biplot have higher elevation and slope than those to the right. There was little overlap in the ellipses between time periods, which reinforces results showing a significant difference in habitat characteristics between the 1990s and the 2000s. The DISPER test on group dispersion did not indicate a significant difference in the variances among the year or zone groups. Therefore the observed difference between the year groups cannot be attributed to variance alone.

#### **4.4. Discussion**

Overall there have been large changes in BB habitat and BB polar bear habitat use since the 1990s. The sea-ice habitat has significantly declined over the period of satellite observations, especially since the mid-1990s. The length of summer (number of days from sea-ice retreat in spring to sea-ice advance in fall) is increasing by 12 days/decade. The mean sea-ice concentration during June-October is decreasing by 4 percent/decade. The general pattern of melt has not changed but occurs about 3-4 weeks earlier than in 1990s. These patterns are consistent with that observed for the whole Arctic and has been reported in other polar bear subpopulations.

These changes have had impacts on the movements and habitat choice by polar bears in BB. Movement rates of adult females have declined significantly during summer in the 2000s largely due to disappearance of offshore and archipelago summertime sea ice. Bears are now concentrated on shore on Baffin Island in contrast to the 1990s where bears ranged more widely in summer and had access to sea ice. Some bears also spend the summer in NW Greenland at glacier fronts. This results in localized on-land movements and reduced movement rates in the

2000s. Bears are significantly less likely to move from land onto sea ice in summer in the 2000s than in the 1990s. Adult female bears are significantly closer to land in all months in the 2000s except at the end of breakup (June-July), when they stay on remnant offshore sea ice as long as possible to maximize feeding. This follows well with observations in BB of bears being closer to communities and in higher densities onshore (Dowsley 2005).

Adult female bears use significantly lower sea-ice concentrations in winter and spring in the 2000s than the 1990s. Bears have stronger preferences to be closer to the 300 m depth contour (on shelf waters) in the 2000s, which is also a proxy for land thus meaning bears are closer to the coast. Assigning this to a shift in preference is difficult given the concurrent changes in habitat (e.g., late sea-ice formation in fall influences how far offshore polar bears could potentially be in winter). Models indicated that sea-ice concentration alone does not determine preferred habitat, adult females select for lower sea-ice concentrations if it allows them access to continental shelf waters (<300 m).

Potential long-distance swimming events in BB were, defined as bears traveling rapidly from central Baffin Bay to Baffin Island in summer on sea ice <10% concentration with reduced or no collar transmissions. This was observed in both decades but was more frequent in the 2000s. This has been documented for other polar bear subpopulations where sea ice is increasing and springtime breakup occurs earlier increasing the frequency of long-distance swimming (Pagano et al. 2012).

Overall adult females in BB spend significantly more time on land. Arrival dates on Baffin Island in summer are one month earlier in 2000s. The amount of time bears spent on land has increased by 20-30 days since the 1990s. This follows well with studies in other areas that show similar pattern with sea-ice loss (Atwood et al. 2015, Rode et al. 2015). Adult females in

BB in the 2000s no longer arrive on Devon or Ellesmere Islands but only use Baffin Island. Of note some bears remain in Melville Bay in summer.

Maternity denning appears to have changed in association with environmental changes. Entry dates into maternity dens are >1 month later in the 2000s, although exit dates have not changed. Overall the period of maternity den duration is significantly shorter in BB in the 2000s. The first date of arrival on land by pregnant females is significantly earlier in the 2000s than the 1990s, following well with that of all adult females (see above). Finally habitat selection for den sites has changed, maternity dens in the 2000s now occur at higher elevations and steeper slopes than maternity dens in the 1990s. This may be due to changes in snow cover (reduced snow cover at lower latitudes) though more detailed habitat availability studies are needed.

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**Table 4.1.** Breakdown of adult females (AF) collared in the 1990s and 2000s. AF = adult female, AM = adult male, COY = Cub of the Year, YRL = Yearling, 2YR = 2 Year old cub.

		<b>AF alone</b>	<b>AF+AM</b>	<b>AF+COY</b>	<b>AF+YRL</b>	<b>AF+2YR</b>	<b>Sum</b>
1990s	BB	9		19	13	2	43
2000s	BB	10	2	6	12	8	38

**Table 4.2.** Trends in date of spring sea-ice retreat, fall sea-ice advance, fall – spring dates, and summer (June-Oct) sea-ice concentration in Baffin Bay (all depths, and shallow sub-regions). All trends are statistically significant at the 99% level according to a 2-sided F test.

<b>Baffin Bay region</b>	<b>Trend in date of spring ice retreat (days/decade)</b>	<b>Trend in date of fall ice advance (days/decade)</b>	<b>Trend in fall – spring (days/decade)</b>	<b>Trend in ice con. June- October (percent/decade)</b>
All depths	–7.3	+5.4	+12.7	–4.1
Depths < 300 m	–8.4	+9.7	+18.1	–3.3
Depths < 300 m Baffin I. shelf	–6.8	+3.9	+10.7	–4.7

**Table 4.3.** Mean monthly movement rates in BB for adult female in the 1990s and 2000s. One SE about the mean is given. We conducted a parametric test of significance between decades.

Month	Mean 1990s	SE 1990s	n 1990s	n steps	Mean 2000s	SE 2000s	n 2000s	n steps	t-test p value
1	10.29	0.88	33	195	10.07	1.38	26	225	0.8933
2	11.31	0.96	32	173	8.68	1.18	27	218	0.0898
3	11.83	1.16	32	203	9.47	1.13	27	261	0.1492
4	13.37	1.2	30	244	10.33	1	38	546	0.0558
5	14.05	0.99	31	256	9.68	0.94	37	563	0.0021
6	13.03	0.66	31	269	11.31	1.04	34	480	0.168
7	12.88	1.06	30	239	10.49	1	32	402	0.1057
8	10.52	1.17	27	193	4.77	0.63	30	337	<0.001
9	7.73	1.13	28	172	1.88	0.45	28	258	<0.001
10	5.49	0.82	38	222	4.32	1.36	27	244	0.4683
11	14.52	1.24	37	252	13.43	1.58	26	230	0.5903
12	15.82	1.19	34	213	13.79	1.76	25	233	0.3442

**Table 4.4.** Sea-ice resource selection function (RSF) model coefficients for the Winter season in BB using CLOGIT. The P-value delta is for the interaction between the 1990s to the 2000s for each covariate within the multivariate model. Coefficients are scaled for ease of interpretation. “Mean ice conc.10” is the mean sea-ice concentration around the bear in a circular radius scaled by 10%. “Dist to 50%” is the distance to the 50% sea-ice concentration scaled by 100 km. “Dist to 300 m” is the distance to the 300 m depth contour scaled by units of 100 m. “Depth.100” is the absolute value of bathymetry scaled by 100 m. “Land” is the variable that describes the tendency of a bear to move from sea ice on to land.

	<b>1990s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>2000s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>1990s</b>	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>2000s</b>	<b>delta</b>
Mean ice conc.10	0.075	0.025	0.0025	-0.022	0.023	0.3452	0.0043
Dist to 50%.100	-0.100	0.044	0.0237	-0.107	0.052	0.0383	0.9197
Dist to 300 m.100	0.001	0.148	0.9968	-0.619	0.205	0.0026	0.0144
Depth.100	-0.032	0.010	0.0011	-0.019	0.012	0.1021	0.4266
Land	-1.617	0.295	0.0000	-2.12	0.267	0	0.2065

**Table 4.5.** Sea-ice resource selection function (RSF) model coefficients for the Spring season in BB using CLOGIT. The P-value delta is for the interaction between the 1990s to the 2000s for each covariate within the multivariate model. Coefficients are scaled for ease of interpretation. “Mean ice conc.10” is the mean sea-ice concentration around the bear in a circular radius scaled by 10%. “Dist to 50%” is the distance to the 50% sea-ice concentration scaled by 100 km. “Dist to 300 m” is the distance to the 300 m depth contour scaled by units of 100 m. “Depth.100” is the absolute value of bathymetry scaled by 100 m. “Land” is the variable that describes the tendency of a bear to move from sea ice on to land.

	<b>1990s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>2000s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>1990s</b>	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>2000s</b>	<b>delta</b>
Mean ice conc.10	0.162	0.022	0	0.255	0.026	0	0.0066
Dist to 50%.100	-0.115	0.041	0.0047	-0.376	0.042	0	0
Dist to 300 m.100	-0.199	0.111	0.0727	-0.088	0.111	0.4265	0.4789
Depth.100	-0.014	0.007	0.0606	0.011	0.007	0.1111	0.014
Land	-1.738	0.291	0	-1.059	0.312	0.0007	0.1111

**Table 4.6.** Sea-ice resource selection function (RSF) model coefficients for the Summer season in BB using CLOGIT. The P-value delta is for the interaction between the 1990s to the 2000s for each covariate within the multivariate model. Coefficients are scaled for ease of interpretation. “Elev.100” is elevation scaled by units of 100 m. “Slope.10” is slope in degrees scaled by units of 10 degrees. “Aspect.10” is aspect scaled by units of 10 degrees. “BIdistCoast.10” is the distance to the smoothed Baffin Island coastline (measured from a point inland) scaled by 10 km. “Not Land” is the tendency of a bear to move from land on to sea ice.

	<b>1990s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>2000s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>1990s</b>	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>2000s</b>	<b>delta</b>
elev.100	-0.09	0.03	0.0033	-0.091	0.017	0	0.9627
slope.10	0.22	0.065	0.0007	0.202	0.036	0	0.8118
aspect.10	0.001	0.007	0.8484	-0.005	0.004	0.1933	0.4231
BIdistCoast.10	-0.456	0.069	0	-0.358	0.042	0	0.2243
NotLand	-1.182	0.234	0	-2.44	0.16	0	0



**Table 4.7.** Summary table of 78 arrival dates and 71 departure dates for individual radio-collared adult female bears arriving on Baffin Island or Devon Island (within the seasonal sea-ice ecoregion). We excluded two bears from the 1990s that arrived on Ellesmere (2 arrivals and 2 departures by two individuals = i.e., in the archipelago ecoregion of Amstrup et al. 2008). There was a significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) earlier arrival on land in the 2000s. No difference in departure date from land between 1990s and 2000s. Significance did not change with the inclusion of the Ellesmere bears.

Decade	Arrival date on land	Departure date from land
1990s	Aug 23 (SD 16 days) n=30	Nov 1 (SD 21 days) n=42
2000s	Aug 4 (SD 11 days) n=46	Nov 8 (SD 9 days) n=27

**Table 4.8.** Table of number of days (time on land) on Baffin Island (or Devon Island in the 1990s). Data composed from 56 paired arrival/departure dates from individual adult female bears. There was a significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) increase in time on land in the 2000s, between ~30 days longer between decades.

Decade	n	Min # days	Max # days	Mean #	SD of mean
		on land	on land	days on land	
1990s	14	8	99	62.3	25.0
2000s	26	56	120	94.8	15.7

**Table 4.9.** Number of maternity and shelter dens in Baffin Bay in the 1990s and 2000s.

<b>All Dens</b>		<b>Maternity Dens</b>		<b>Shelter Dens</b>	
1990s	29	1990s	8	1990s	21
2000s	21	2000s	16	2000s	5
Total	50	Total	24	Total	26

**Table 4.10.** Summary table of the habitat characteristics for Baffin Bay maternity and shelter dens (two NW Greenland dens were not included). Elev. = elevation (meters), Asp. = aspect (degrees), CoastDist = distance to nearest coastline (kilometers).

<b>All Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 24)</b>					<b>All Shelter Dens (<i>n</i> = 26)</b>			
	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)
Mean	583.3	166.2	19.2	9.5	421.8	224.7	19.9	7.4
Min	101.0	0.0	2.4	0.4	0	−1	0	0.1
Max	1323.0	357.6	32.9	20.2	1116	357.2	46.7	54.5
Median	623.0	175.2	18.5	7.8	354	249.3	19.4	4.7
SD	306.1	102.4	8.8	6.3	320.5	124.8	12.6	10.7
<b>1990s Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 8)</b>					<b>1990s Shelter Dens (<i>n</i> = 21)</b>			
	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)
Mean	351.3	150.6	11.9	10.2	414.9	210.1	20.4	7.9
Min	131	18.4	2.4	2.2	0	−1	0	0.1
Max	623	357.6	21.4	20.2	1116	357.2	46.7	54.5
Median	279	99.1	12.1	7.6	354	247.6	20.1	4.9
SD	194.5	135.7	6.4	6.5	335.5	128.5	13.5	11.4
<b>2000s Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 15)</b>					<b>2000s Shelter Dens (<i>n</i> = 4)</b>			
	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)
Mean	707.0	174.4	23.1	9.2	458.3	301.7	17.1	4.9
Min	101.0	0.0	6.1	0.4	169.0	196.4	10.3	0.2
Max	1323.0	320.6	32.9	18.6	728.0	344.4	26.9	15.3
Median	693.0	182.2	23.0	8.3	468.0	332.9	15.5	2.0
SD	284.9	83.9	7.4	6.3	263.2	70.4	7.4	7.0

**Table 4.11.** Summary table of the phenology for Baffin Bay maternity dens including the Greenland maternity den. One maternity den from the 2000s data did not have an exit date and was excluded from the table. Entry and exit dates were quantified as day of year (DOY; Day #1 is 1 January).

	<b>1990s</b>			<b>2000s</b>		
	<b>Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 8)</b>			<b>Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 15)</b>		
	Entry DOY	Exit DOY	Duration (# days)	Entry DOY	Exit DOY	Duration (# days)
Mean	249.8	78.9	194.1	277.7	79.8	167.1
Min	230	73	163	237	60	121
Max	281	82	217	324	91	212
Median	240	79.5	201	276	80	164
SD	21.3	3.6	21	27.7	8.7	27.6

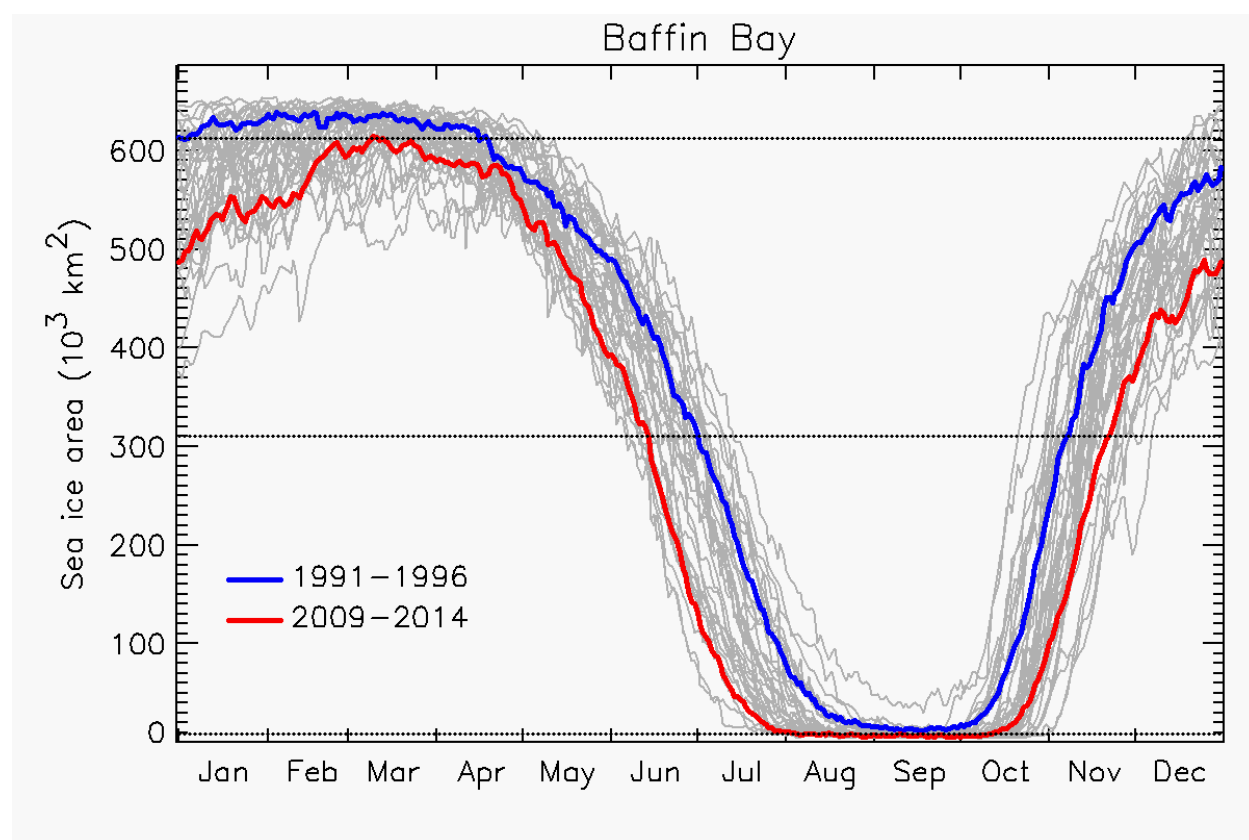
**Table 4.12.** Results of the two-sample Mann-Whitney U tests comparing habitat characteristics for Baffin Bay maternity and shelter dens (note that the den in Greenland was not included).

	<b>Maternity Dens (<math>n = 23</math>)</b>		<b>Shelter Dens (<math>n = 25</math>)</b>	
	<b>W</b>	<b><i>p</i>-value</b>	<b>W</b>	<b><i>p</i>-value</b>
Elevation	105	0.003	20	0.695
Slope	105	0.003	25	0.695
Aspect	74	0.392	17	0.262
Distance to Coast	55	0.776	24	0.369

**Table 4.13.** Summary table of results from the principal component analysis on the Baffin Bay maternity dens matrix (the Greenland maternity den was omitted). None of the principal components (PC) were significant, though PC 1 and 2 were able to capture over half of the variation in the data. Principal component loadings greater than 0.6 or less than  $-0.6$  were considered significant (in bold).

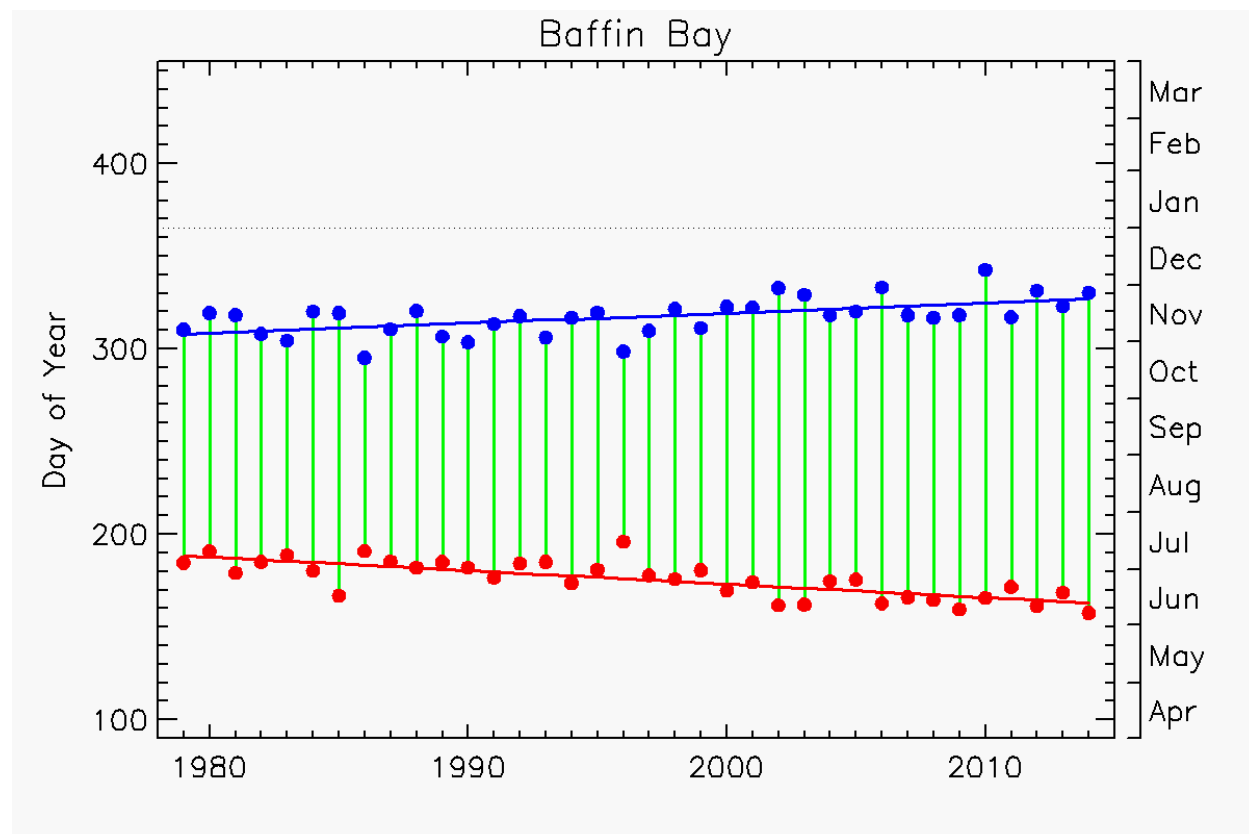
Principal Component Analysis Summary					Principal Component Loadings		
	Eigenvalue	% Var.	Cum. % Var.	<i>p</i> -value		PC 1 (37.31%)	PC 2 (28.38%)
PC 1	1.49	37.31	37.31	0.465	Elevation	$-0.659$	0.375
PC 2	1.24	28.38	65.69	0.413	Aspect	$-0.210$	$-0.770$
PC 3	0.99	24.64	90.33	0.061	Slope	$-0.604$	$-0.375$
PC 4	0.39	9.67	100	0.908	CoastDist	$-0.396$	0.356

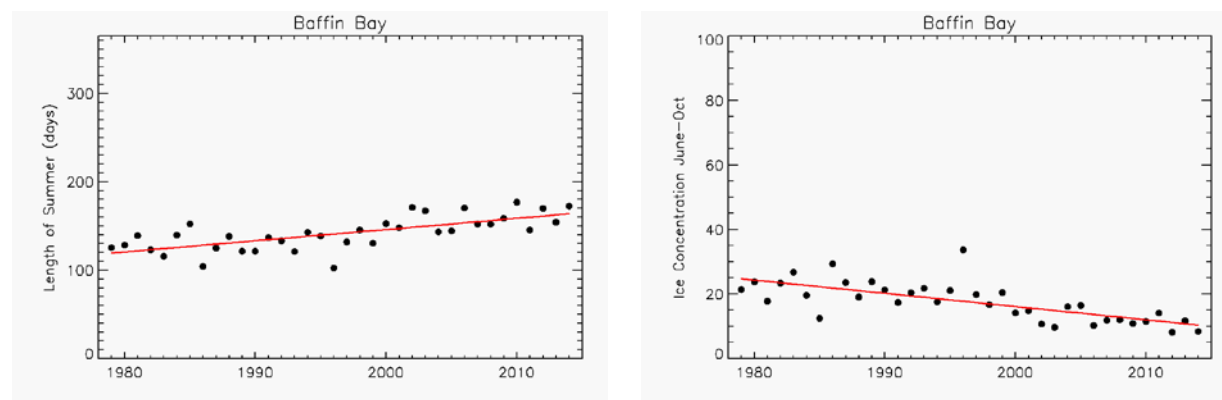
**Figure 4.1.** Sea-ice area in Baffin Bay (shown for all depths) for the years 1979-2014 (gray curves) using SSM-I passive microwave data. Two six-year averages are also shown (red and blue curves) that approximate the sampling dates for the MR. The threshold for defining the dates of sea-ice retreat and advance (middle horizontal dotted line) is halfway between the average March sea-ice area (upper dotted line) and the average September sea-ice area (lower dotted line).





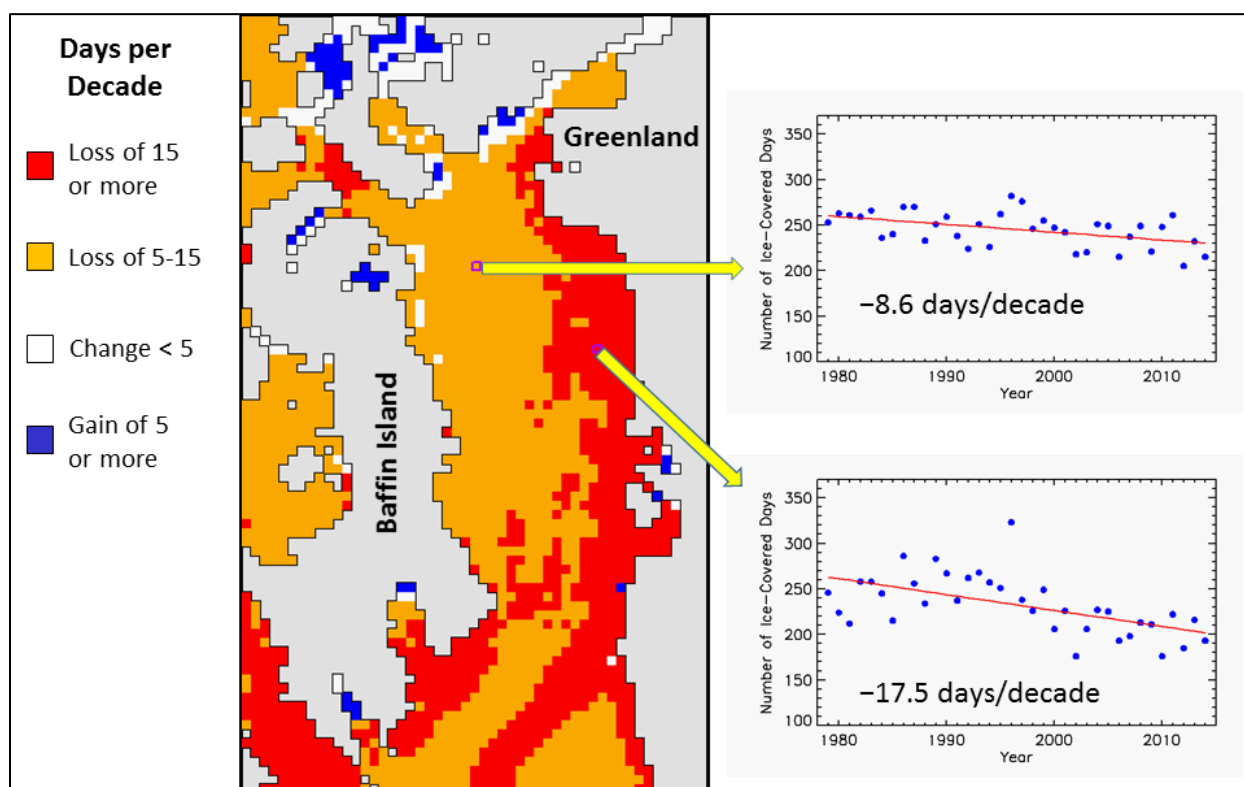
**Figure 4.2.** Day of spring sea-ice retreat (red circles), fall sea-ice advance (blue circles), and the interval between them (green lines), for Baffin Bay (all depths), 1979-2014. Least-squares fits to spring and fall dates are shown (red and blue lines). Trends are given in Table 4.1.



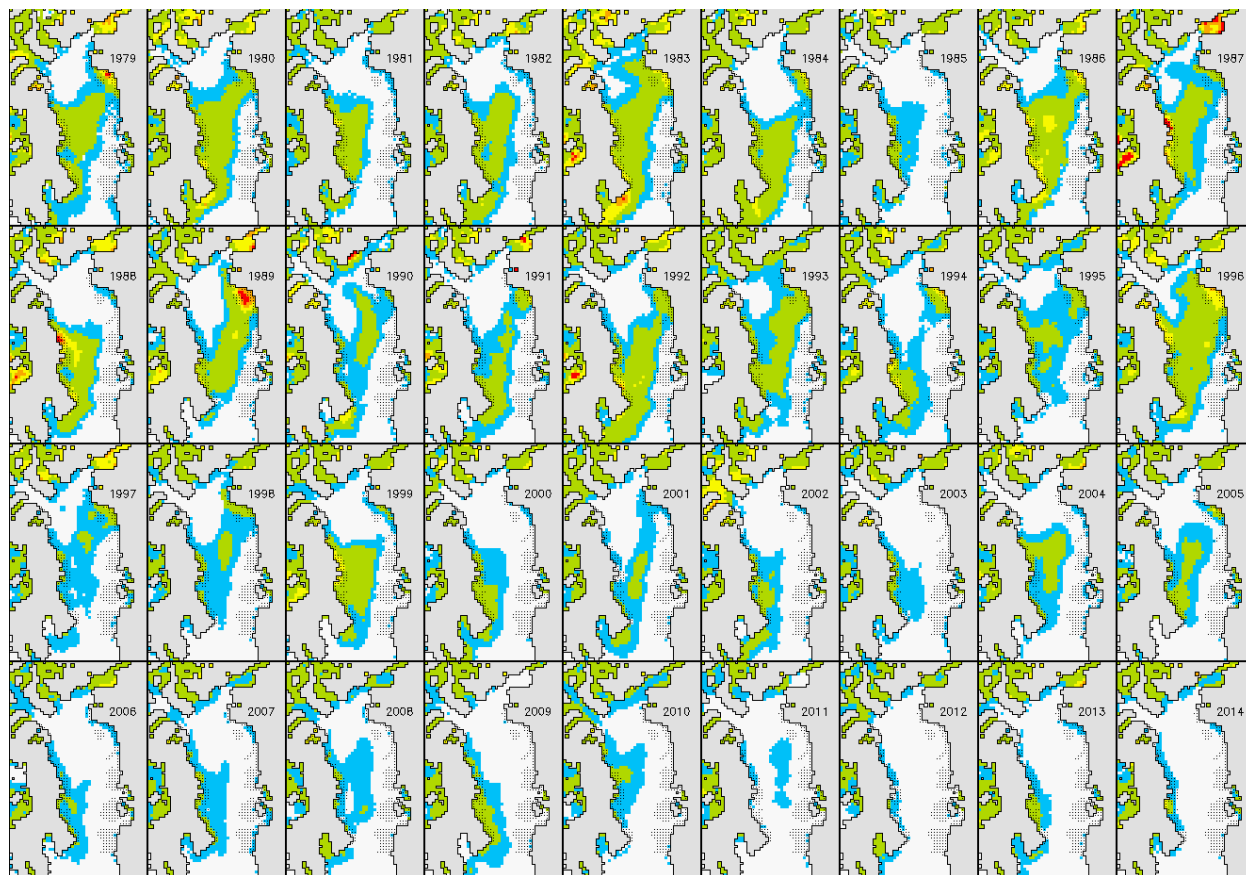


**Figure 4.3.** Length of summer (left) and mean sea-ice concentration during June-October (right) for Baffin Bay (all depths), 1979-2014. Length of summer is the interval from spring sea-ice retreat to fall sea-ice advance (see Figure 4.2, green lines). Least-squares fits are shown (red lines); trends are given in Table 4.1.

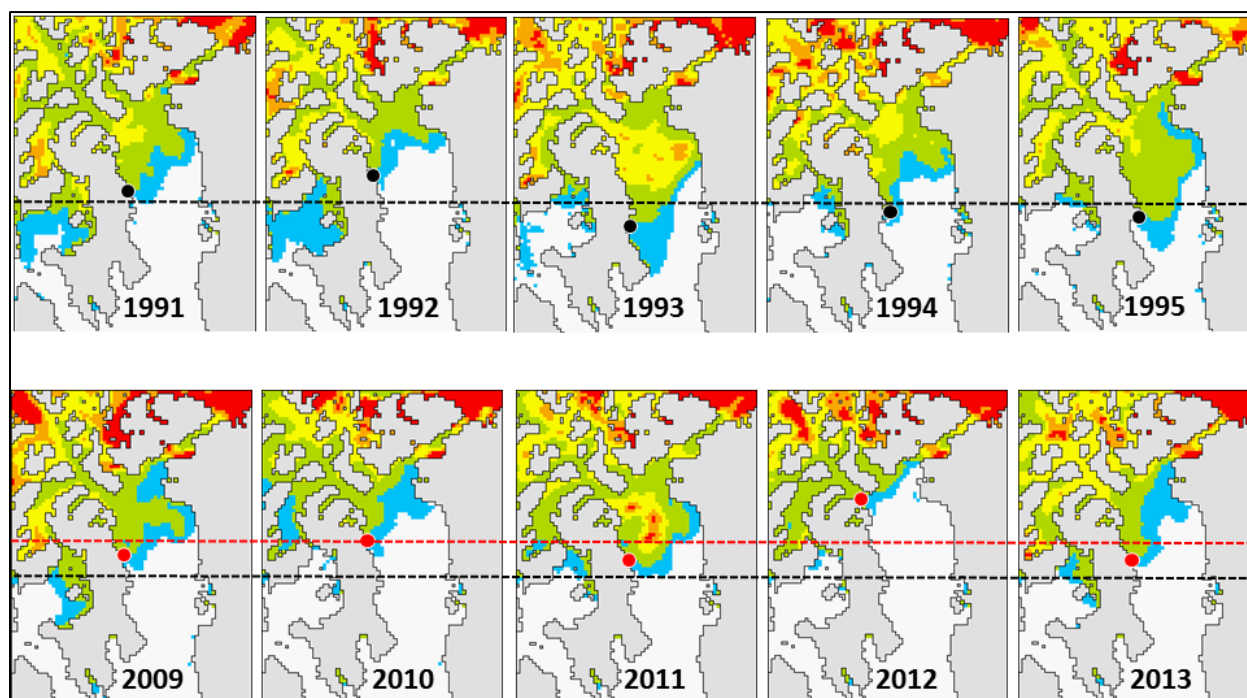
**Figure 4.4.** Trend in the number of ice-covered days, 1979-2014, color-coded for each grid cell, as indicated in the legend at left. Time series of the number of ice-covered days are shown for two specific grid cells, one in central Baffin Bay (upper right) and one close to the coast of Greenland (lower right). Least-squares fits (red lines) and numerical trends are indicated. An ice-covered day is one in which the sea-ice concentration exceeds 15%.



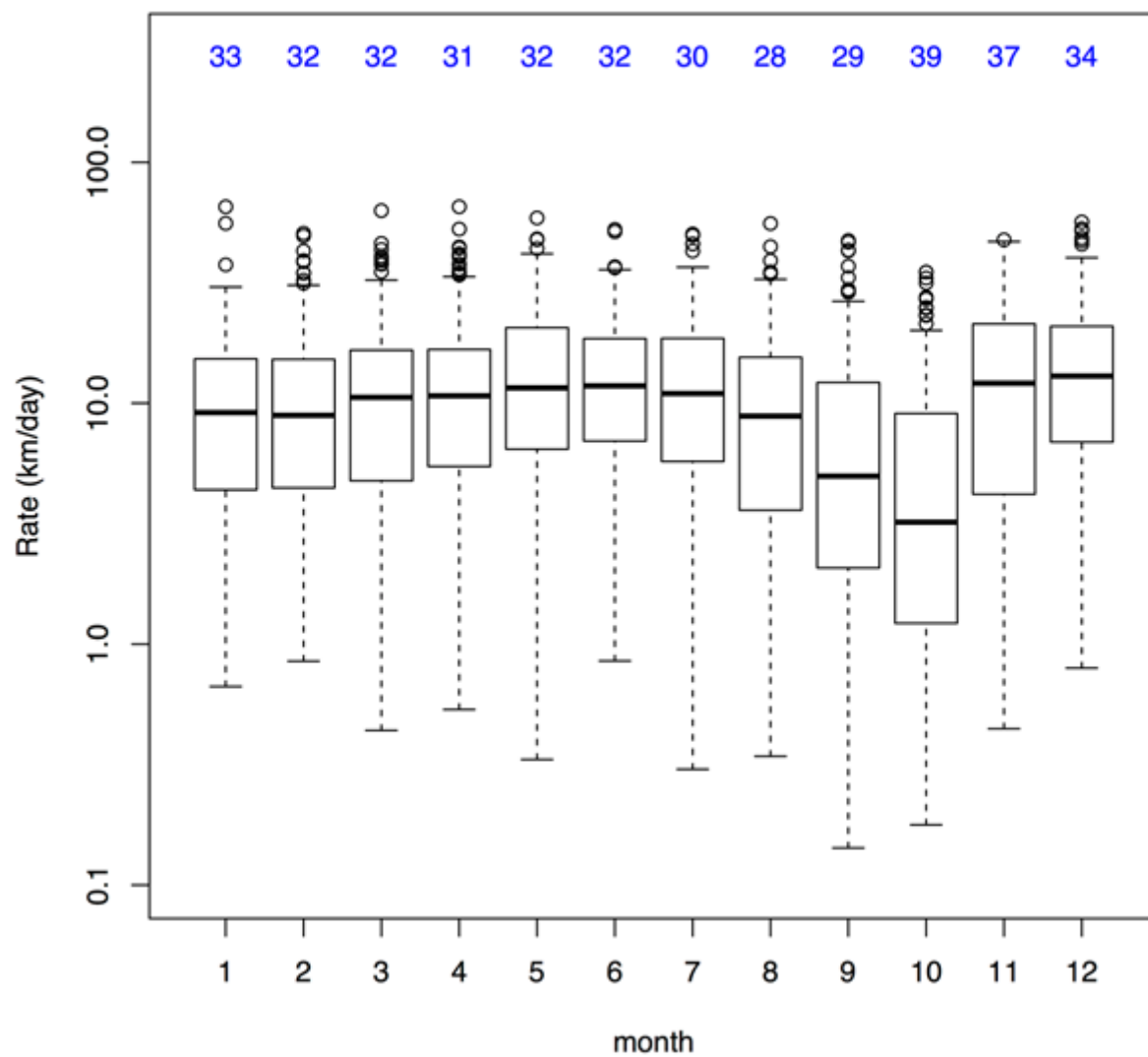
**Figure 4.5.** Sea-ice concentration in Baffin Bay on July 15 of every year from 1979 (upper left) to 2014 (lower right). Color coding: 15-50% (blue), 50-85% (green), 85-95% (yellow), 95-99% (orange), 99-100% (red). Black dots in Baffin Bay indicate shallow depths (< 300 m).



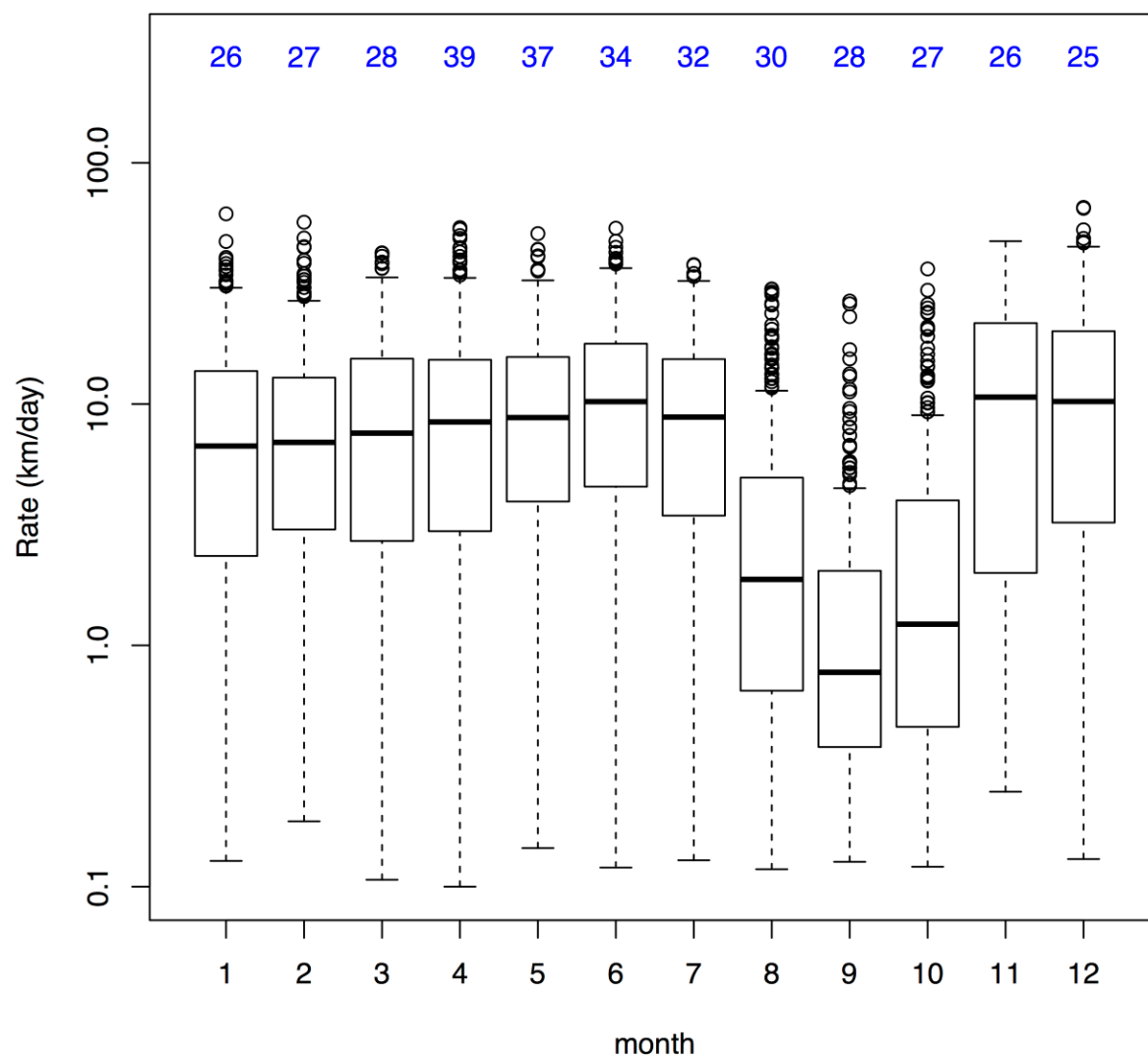
**Figure 4.6.** Location of the leading edge of sea ice (> 50% concentration) along the coast of Baffin Island on November 1 in the years 1991-1995 (top row) and 2009-2013 (bottom row). Color coding of sea-ice concentration is the same as in Figure 4.5. In the top row, black circles mark the leading edge of sea ice, and the horizontal dashed black line is the average position. In the bottom row, red circles mark the leading edge of sea ice, and the horizontal dashed red line is the average position. The dashed black line is the same as in the top row, showing that in the later period, sea ice has not advanced as far south by November 1 as in the early period.



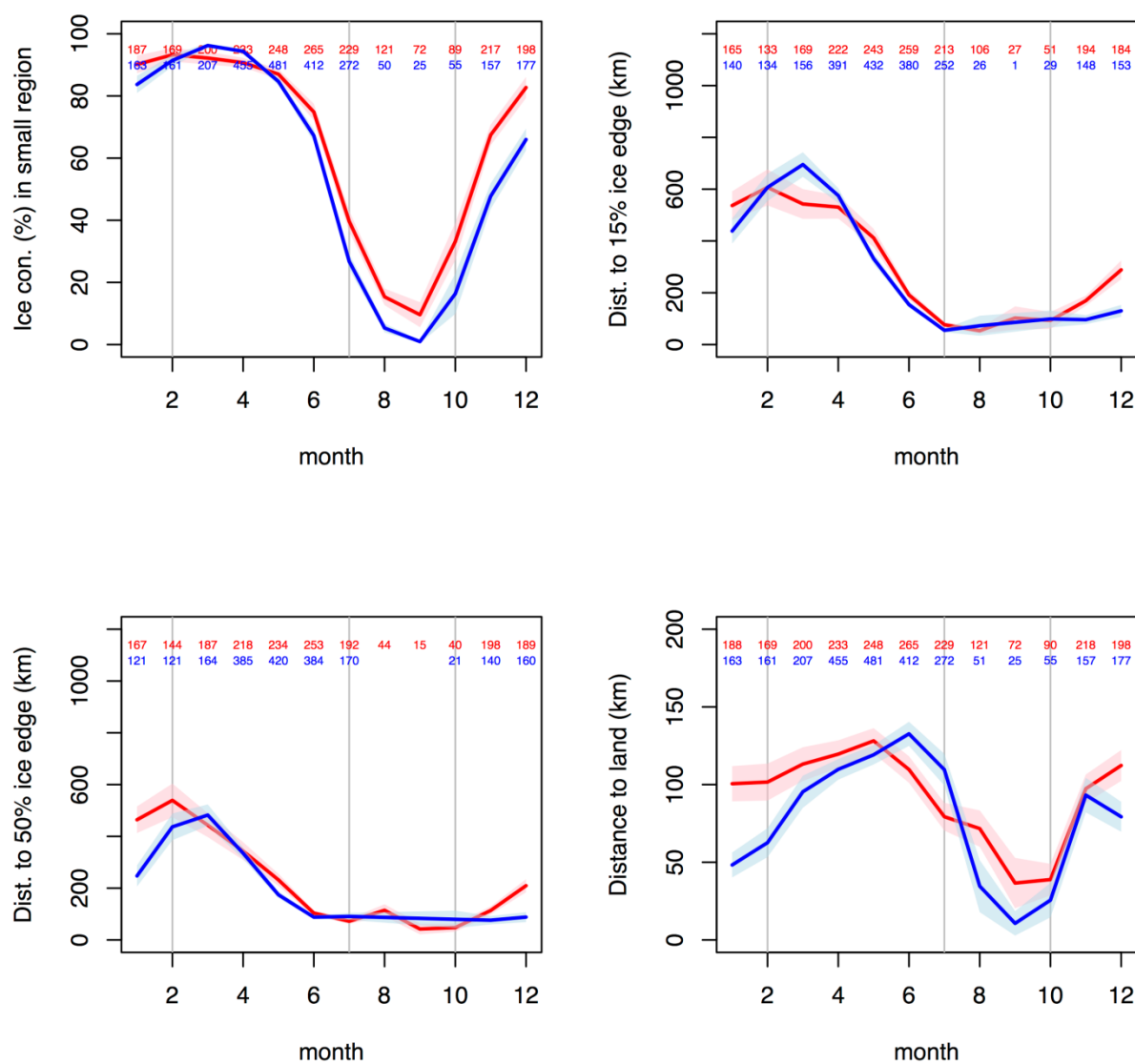
**Figure 4.7.** Movement rate of BB adult female bears (km/day) in the 1990s Y axis is on a log scale and labels are listed as raw values. Blue numbers indicate the number of individual bears in each month.



**Figure 4.8.** Movement rate of BB adult female bears (km/day) in the 2000s Y axis is on a log scale and labels are listed as raw values. Blue numbers indicate the number of individual bears in each month.

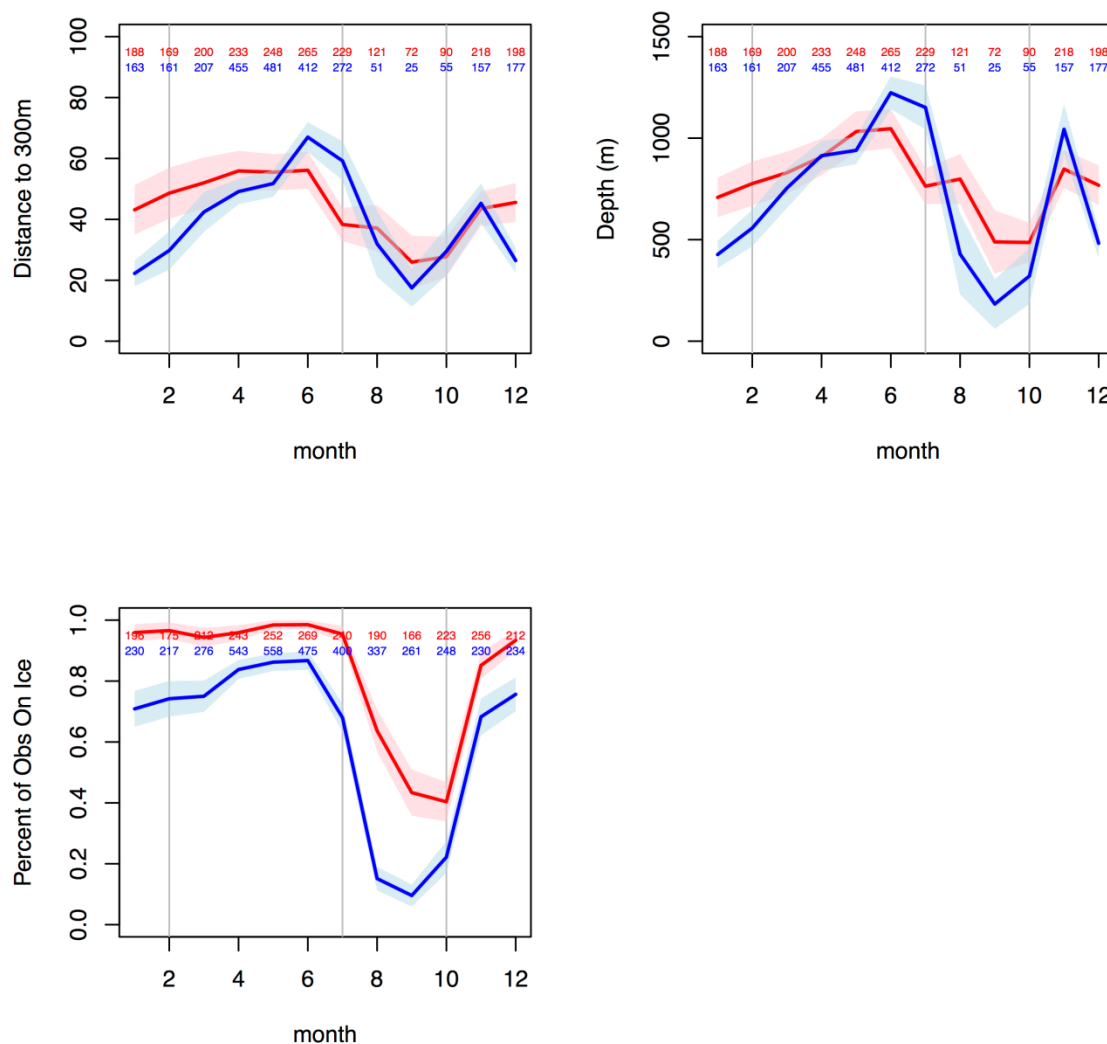


**Fig 4.9.** 1990s and 2000s adult female polar bear habitat use in BB for each of four sea-ice habitat variables: sea-ice concentration in small buffer, distance to 15% sea-ice concentration, distance to 50% sea-ice concentration, and distance to the nearest land. Data from 1990s are shown in red, 2000s in blue. Shaded regions represent 2 SE of the mean. Vertical lines indicate monthly boundaries for seasons (winter, spring summer) used in the analysis. SSM/I sea-ice concentration is used in both decades. All positions are for bears on sea ice or water and resident bears in Melville Bay are excluded. Months 8 -10 also represent land use by bears. The small numbers in blue and red represent the number of movements for each month and decade.

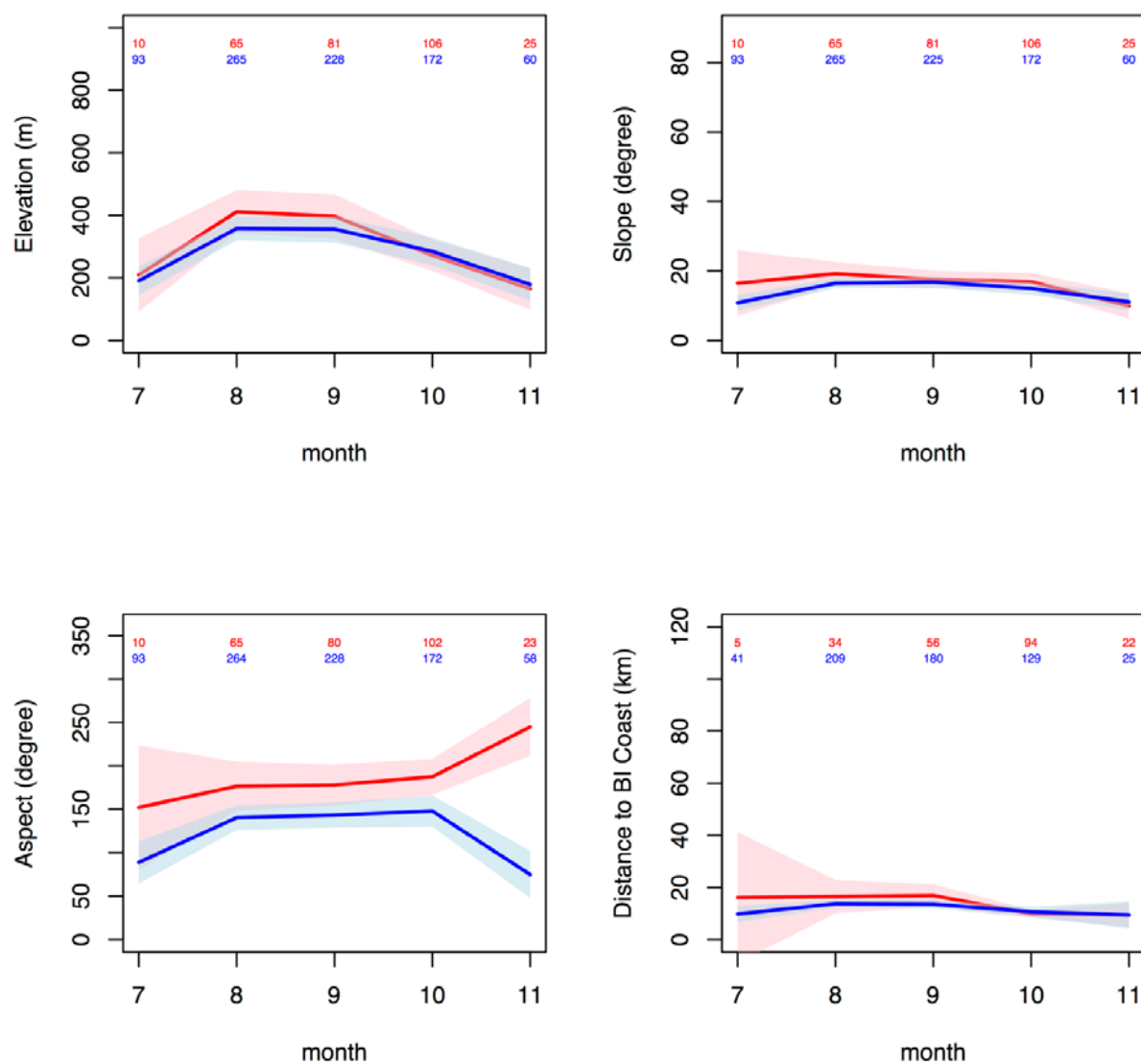




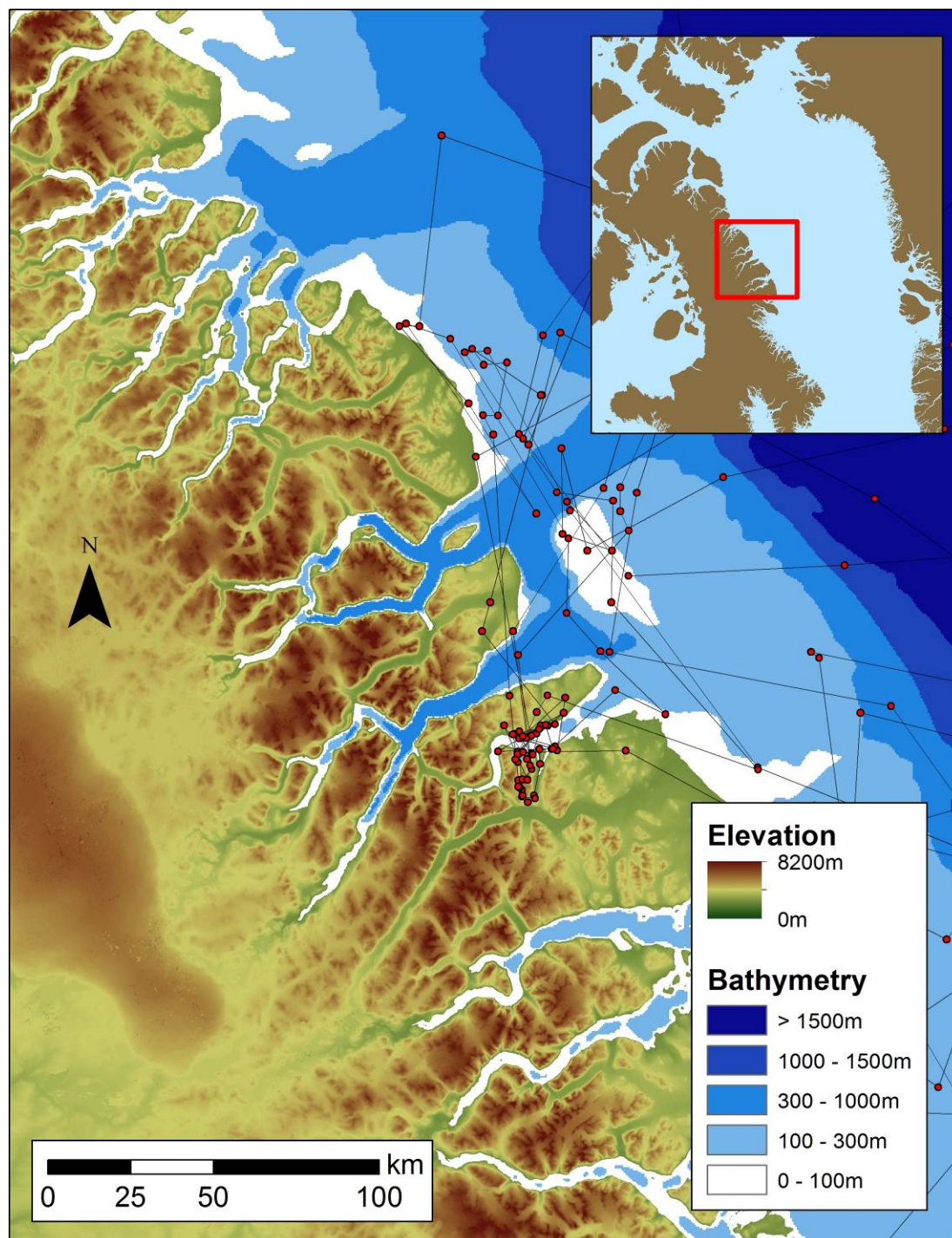
**Fig 4.10.** 1990s and 2000s adult female polar bear habitat use in BB for each of three sea-ice habitat variables: distance to 300 m depth contour, depth (bathymetry), and percentage of observations on the sea ice. Data from 1990s are shown in red, 2000s in blue. Shaded regions represent 2 SE of the mean. Vertical lines indicate monthly boundaries for seasons (winter, spring summer). SSM/I sea-ice concentration is used in both decades. All positions are for bears on ice or water and resident bears in Melville Bay are excluded. Months 8 -10 also represent land use by bears. The small numbers in blue and red represent the number of movements for each month and decade.



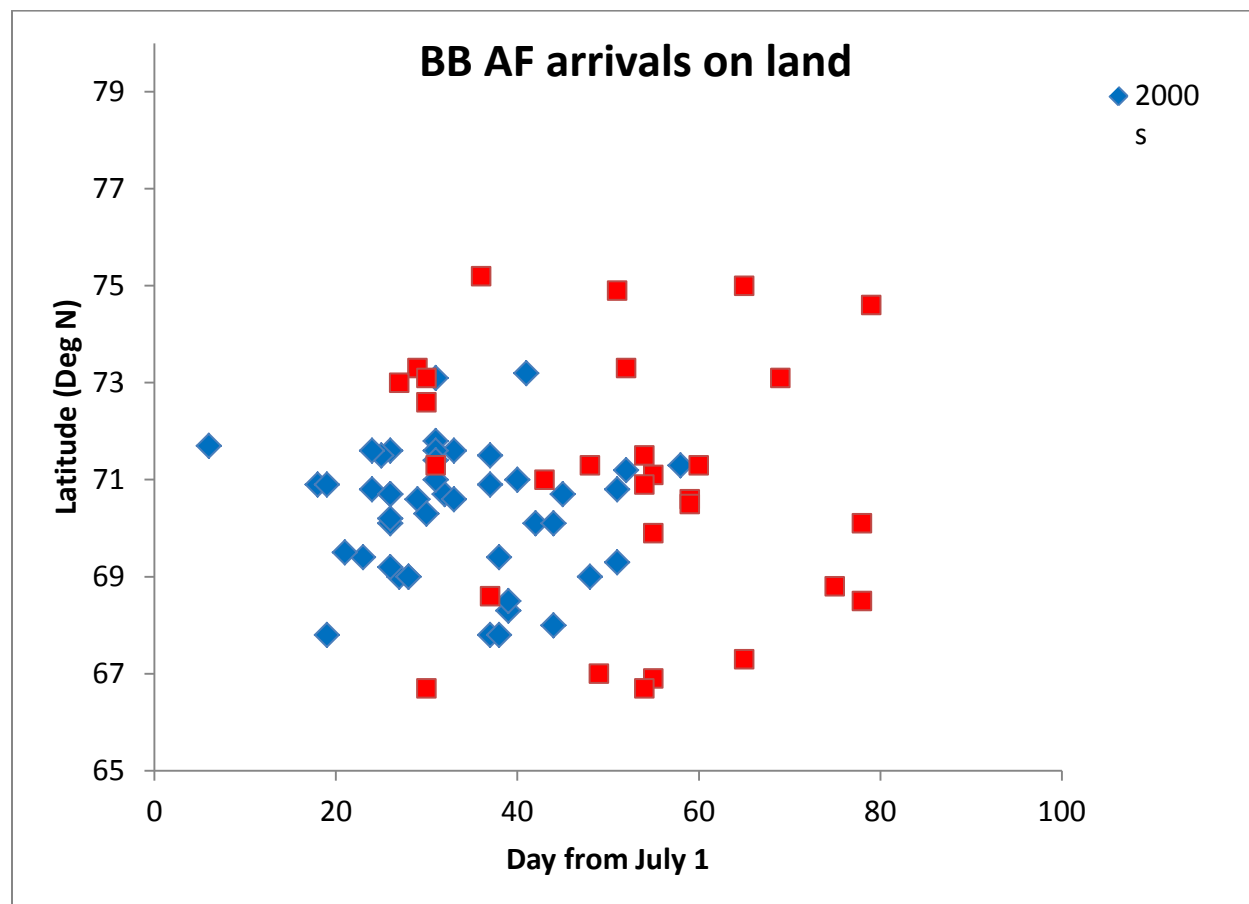
**Figure 4.11.** 1990s and 2000s adult female polar bear habitat use for each of four land habitat variables: Elevation, Slope, Aspect and Distance to the Baffin Island coast (from inland). Data from 1990s are shown in red, 2000s in blue. Shaded regions represent 2 SE of the mean. The small numbers in blue and red represent the number of movements for each month and decade.



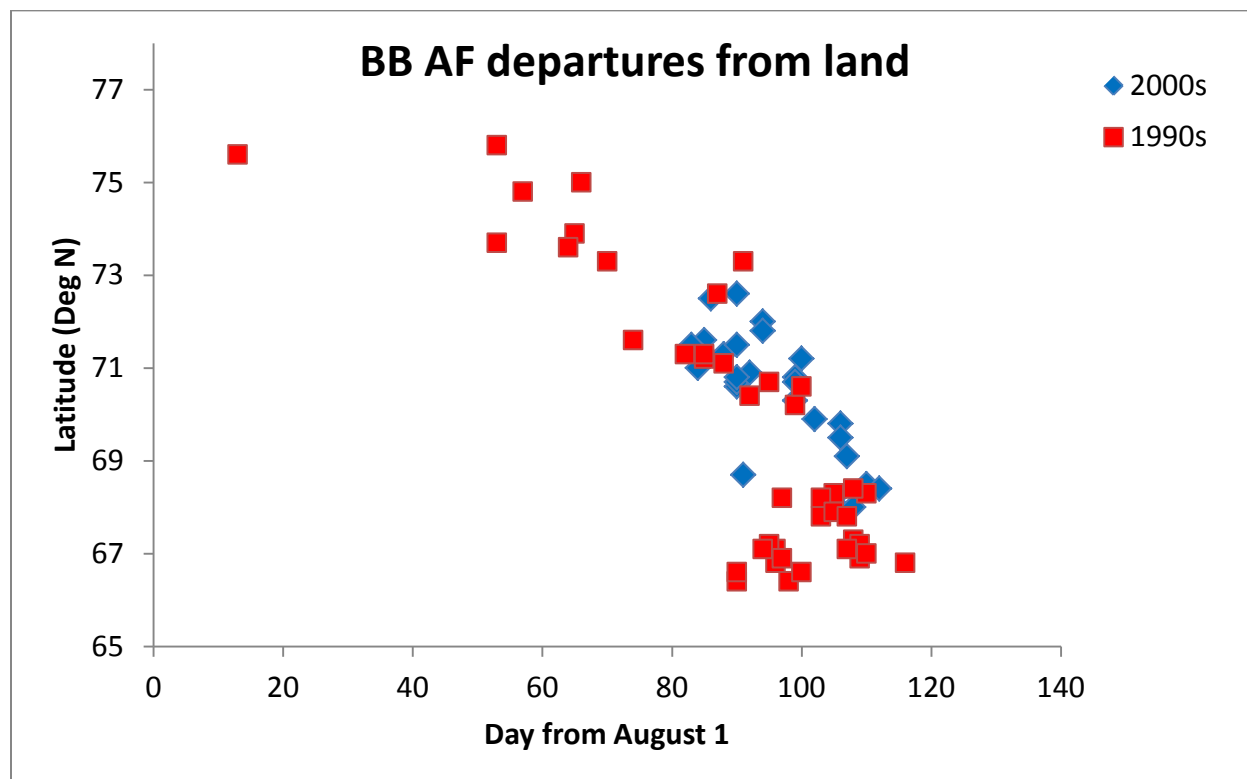
**Figure 4.12.** Map of ASTER Digital Elevation Model (DEM) data and IBCAO bathymetry shown for Baffin Island used in the RSF analyses. Partial tracks from a single adult female (68005) collared in 2009 in West Greenland are shown for reference.



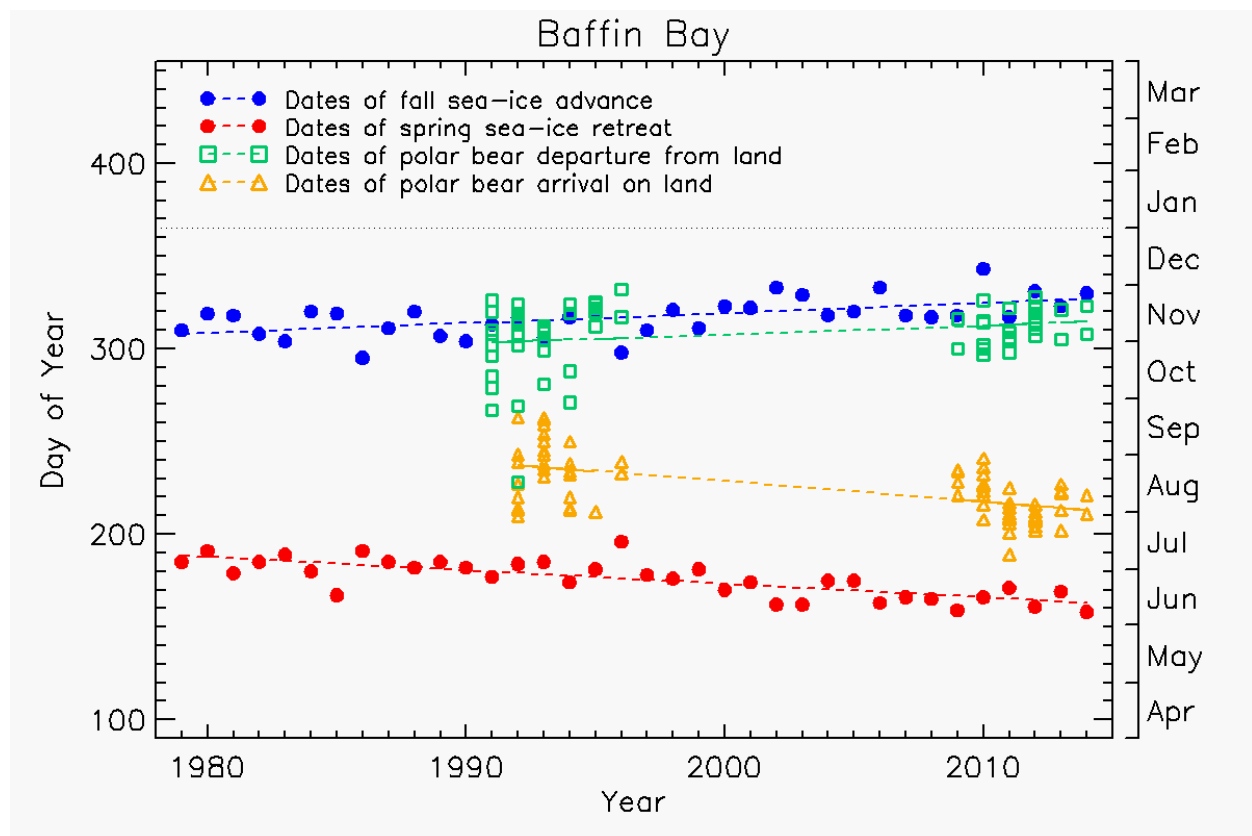
**Figure 4.13.** Arrival dates (on land) for adult female BB polar bears in the 1990s and 2000s. This does not include two BB bears arriving on Ellesmere Island in the 1990s. Also bears in glacial fronts in Melville Bay not included as they remained in coastal habitat year-round.



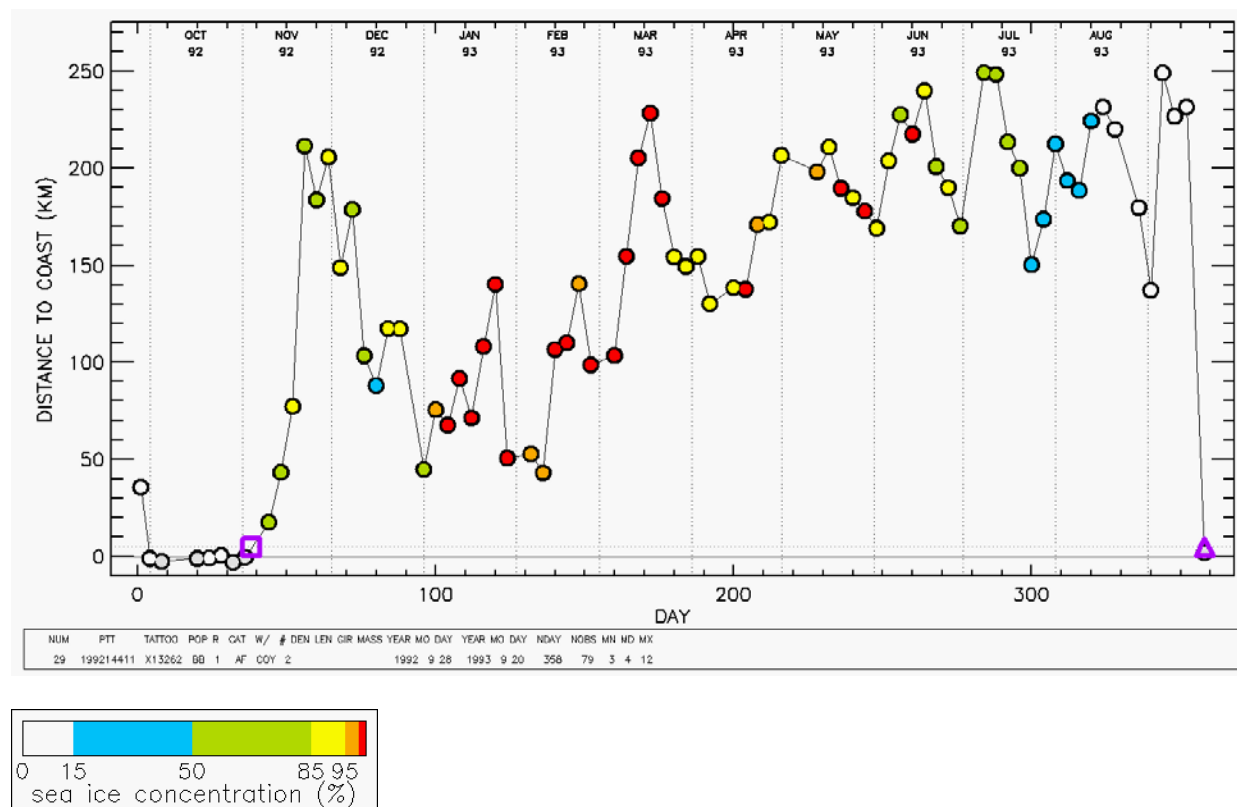
**Fig 4.14.** Departure dates in fall (off land) for adult female BB polar bears in the 1990s and 2000s.



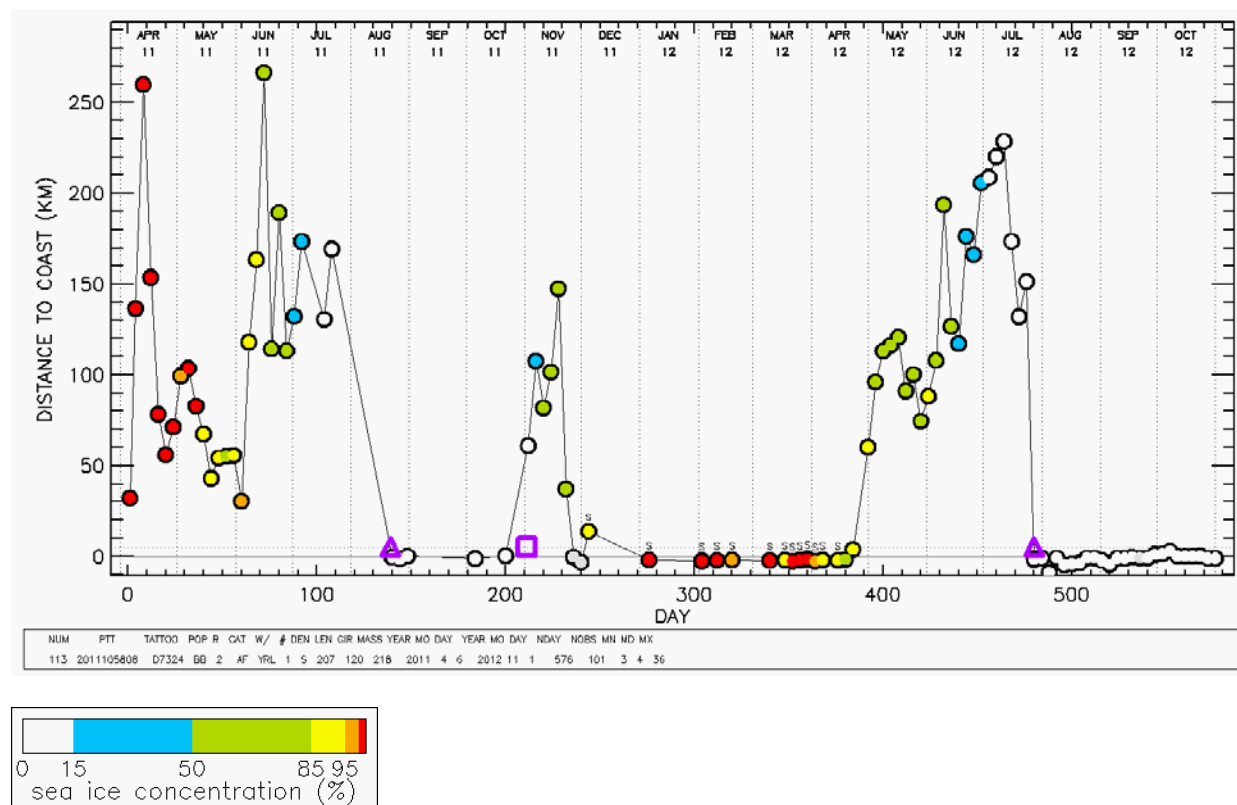
**Figure 4.15.** Correlations between the sea-ice retreat and advance metrics (see methods) and the arrival and departure dates on Baffin Island for adult females in both decades.



**Figure 4.16.** Distance to land vs. time plot for polar bear captured in 1992 (PTT 14411) showing a potential swimming event in September 1993. Purple squares denote the departure date from land on to sea ice and purple triangles denote the arrival date from sea ice/water on to land for that individual.



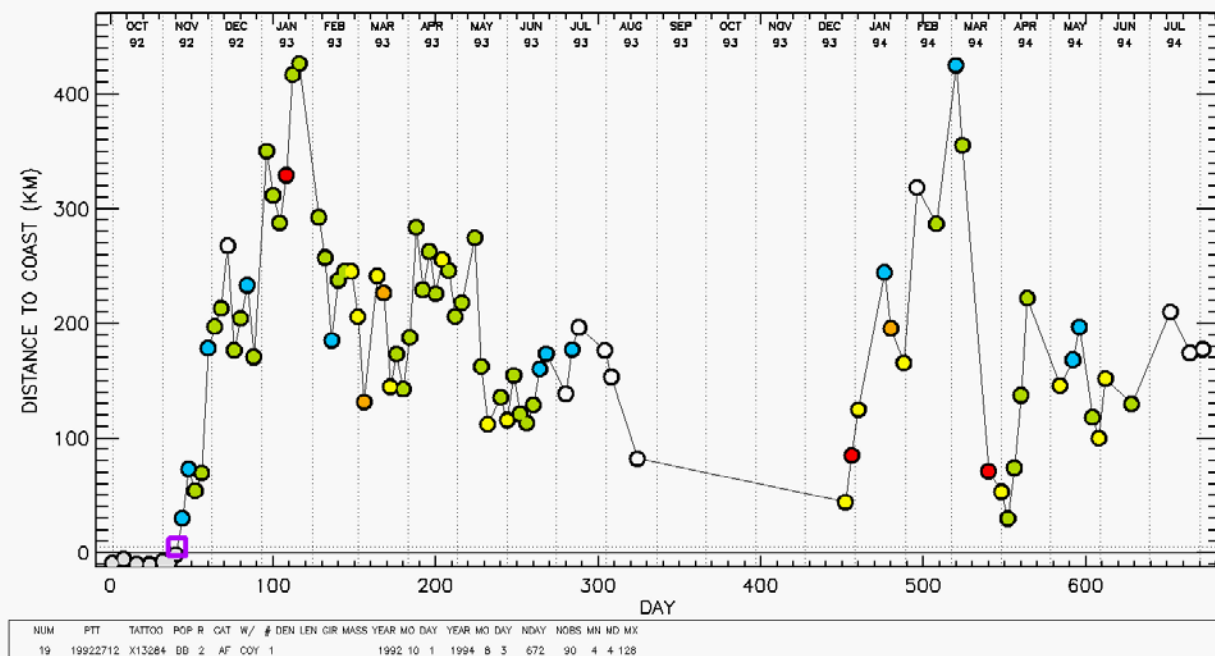
**Figure 4.17.** Distance to land vs. time for polar bear captured in 2011 (PTT 105808) showing an example of a swimming event in both July 2011 and July 2012. Purple squares denote the departure date from land on to sea ice and purple triangles denote the arrival date from sea ice/water on to land for that individual.



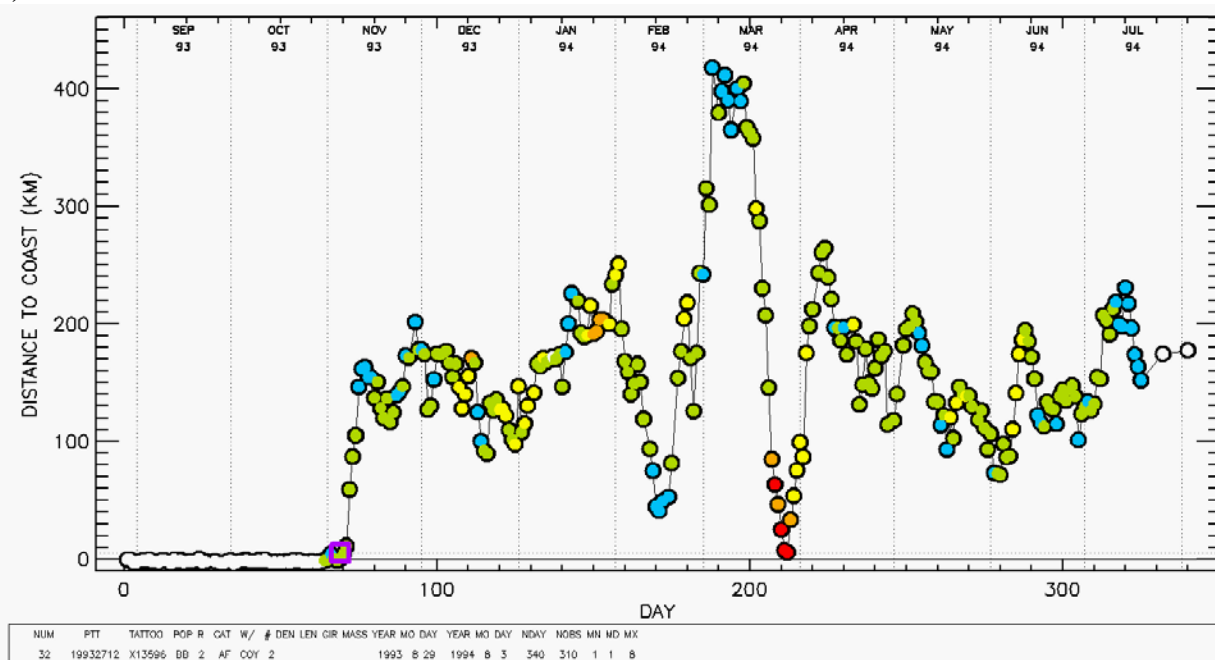


**Figure 4.18.** a) Track of adult female bear tagged in 1992 where the last three locations from the individual occur between July-August 1994 in open water 180 km from land; b) track of adult female bear collared in 1993 through August 1994, where the last two locations occur in open water 180 km from land; and, c) track of an adult female bear collared in April 2011 through July 2011. The last position is 80 km from land in <15% sea ice.

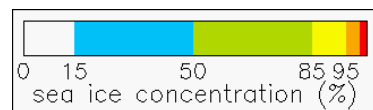
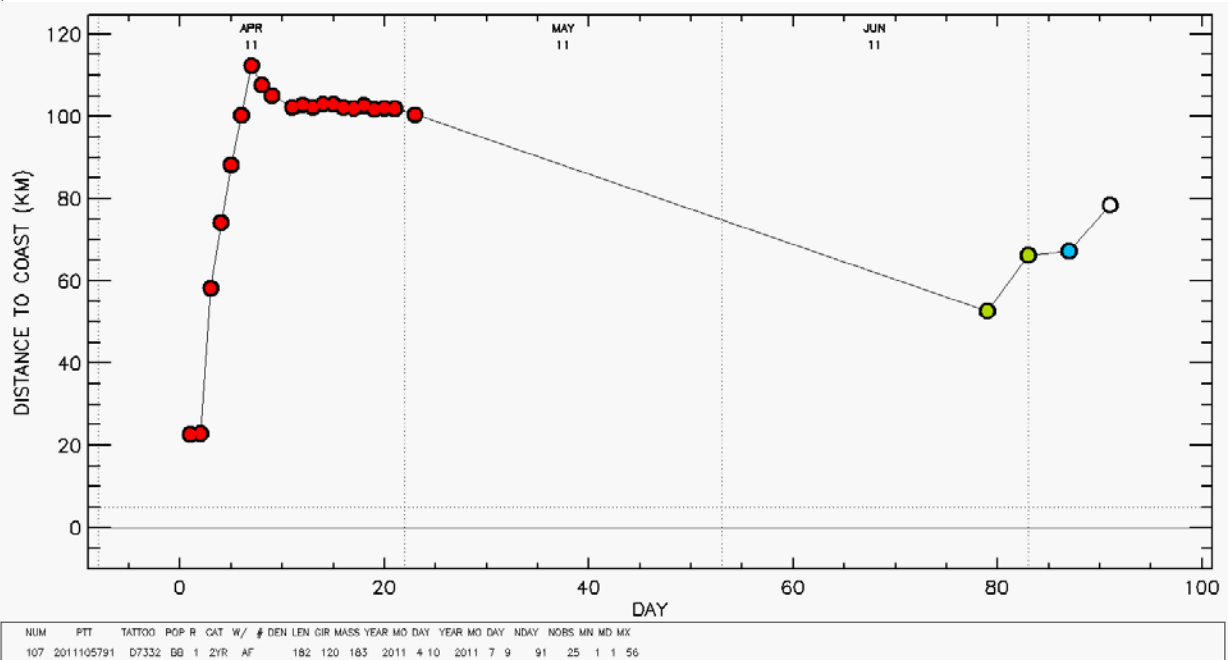
a)

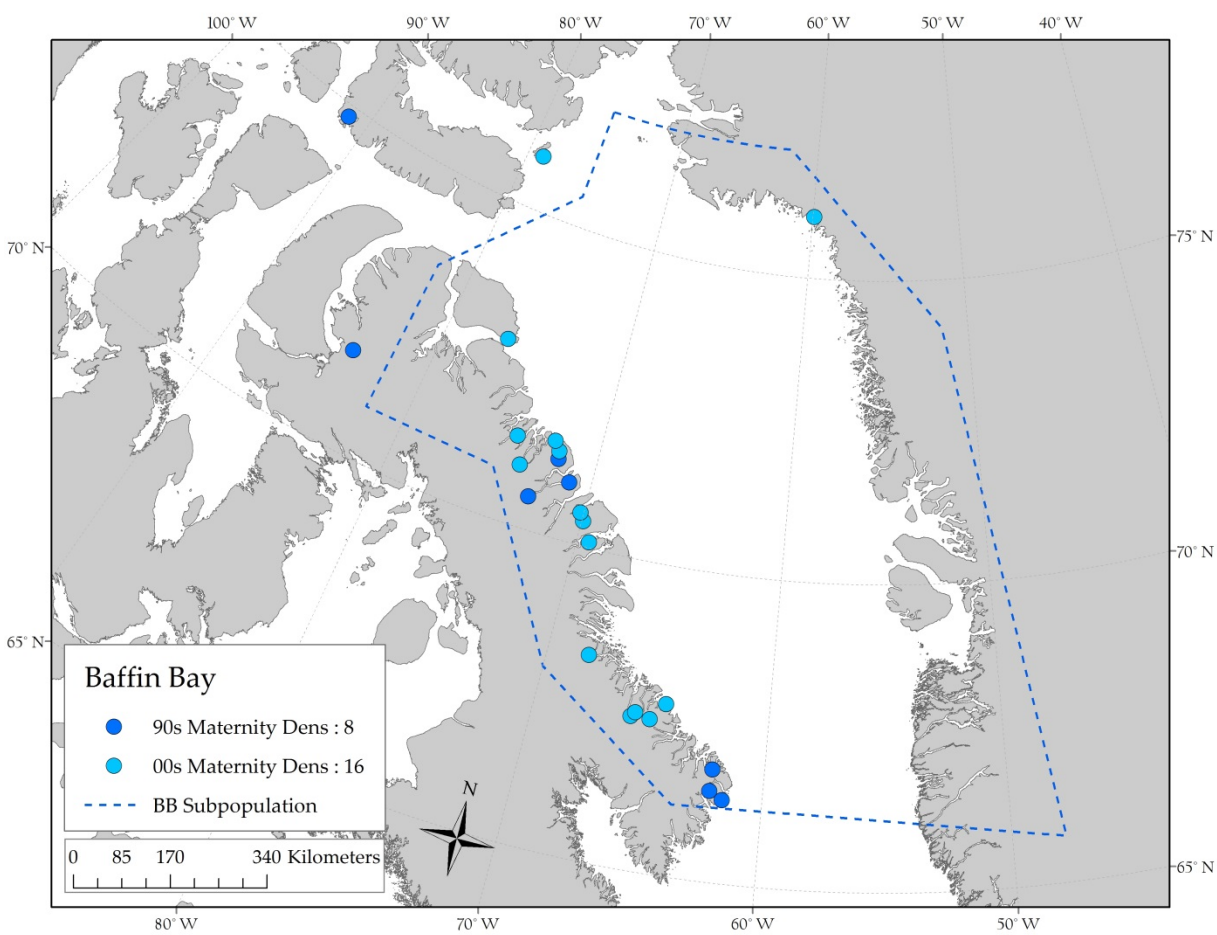


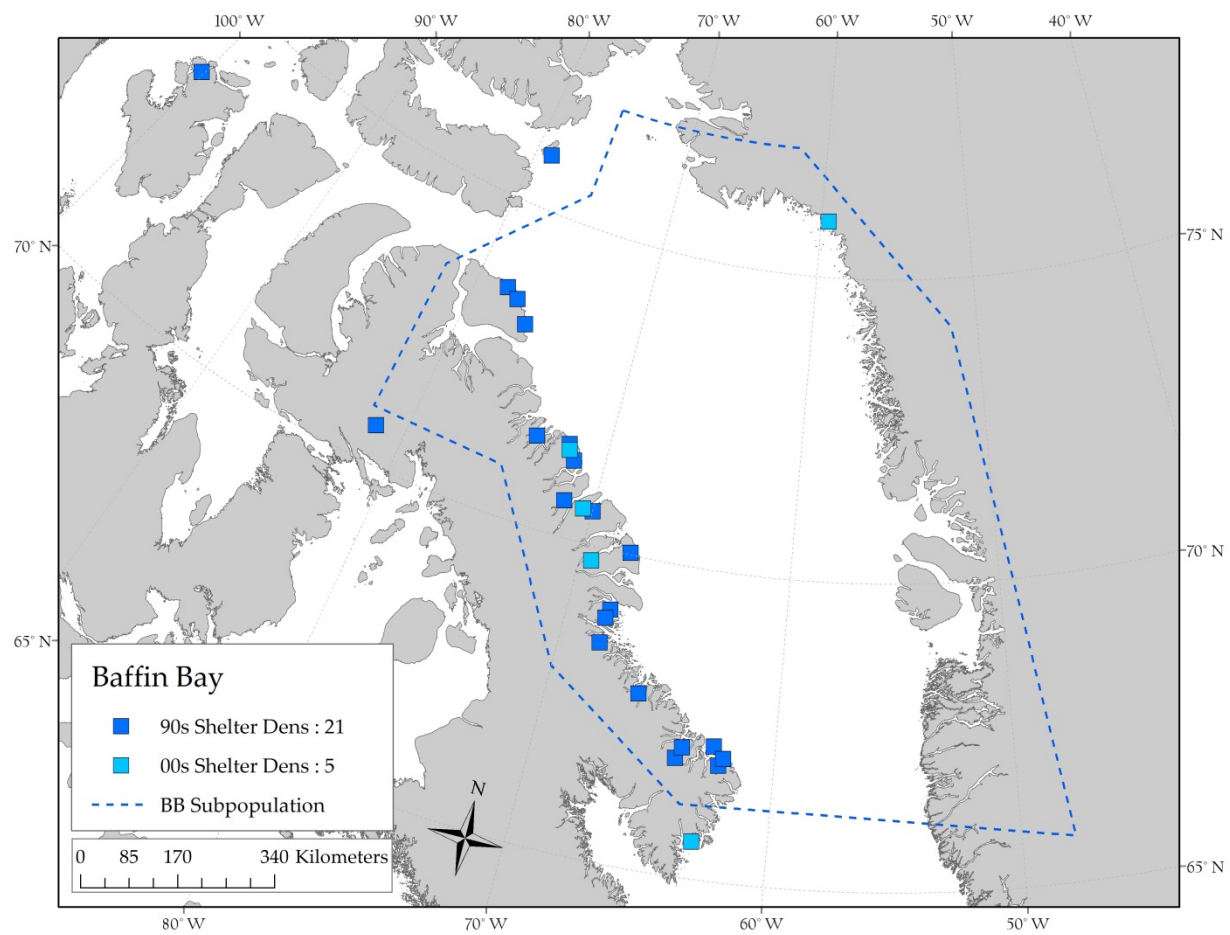
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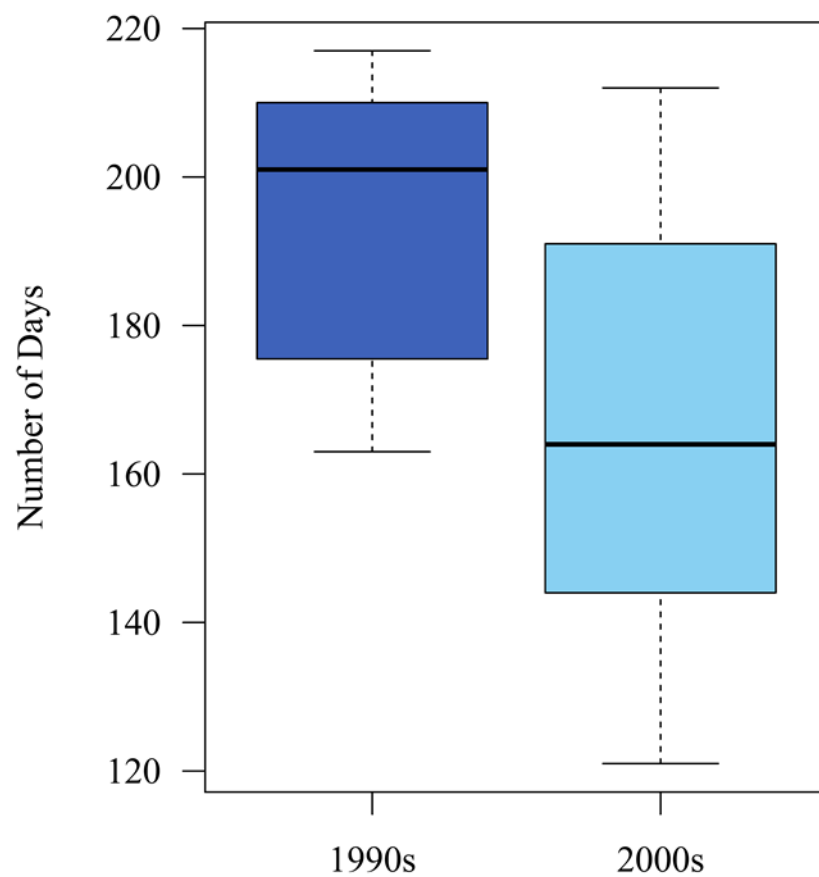
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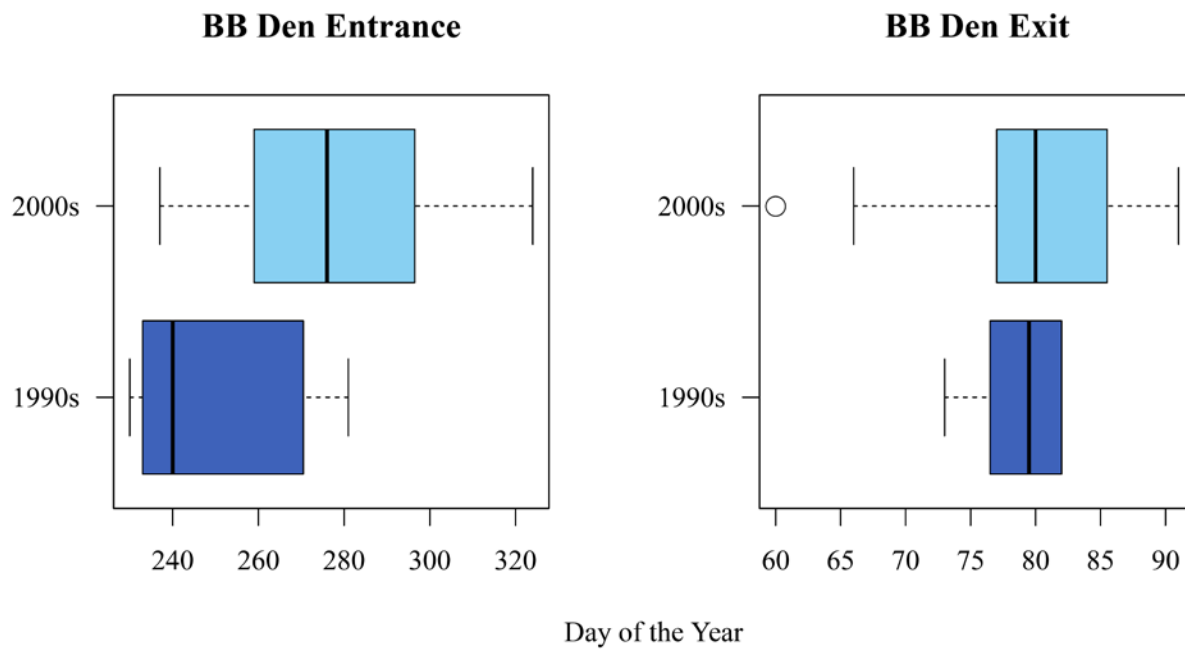
**Figure 4.19.** Maternity den locations in BB by decade.

**Figure 4.20.** Shelter den locations in BB by decade.

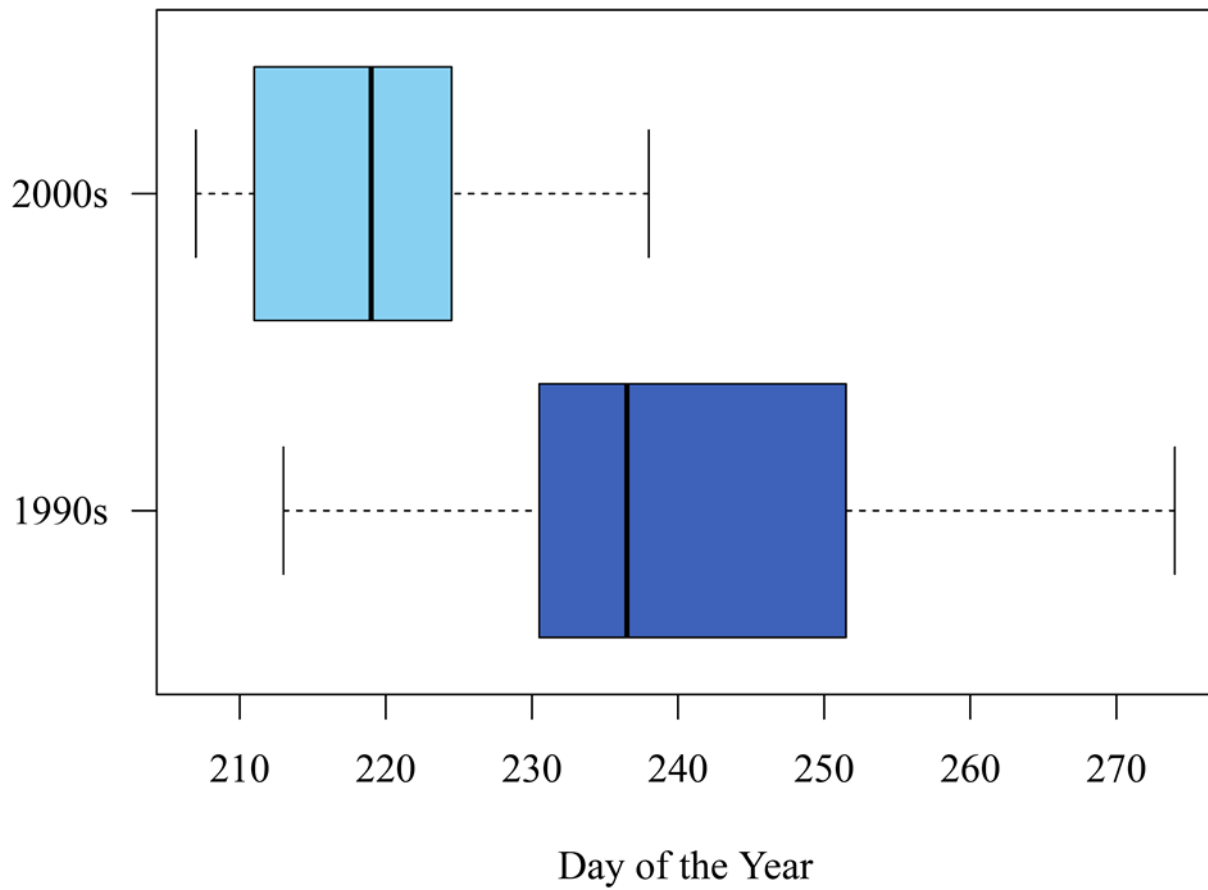
**Figure 4.21.** Boxplots comparing maternity den duration of Baffin Bay maternity dens ( $p = 0.017$ ) (1990s:  $n = 8$ ; 2000s:  $n = 16$ ).



**Figure 4.22.** Boxplots comparing entry ( $p = 0.018$ ) and exit dates ( $p = 0.399$ ) of Baffin Bay maternity dens (1990s:  $n = 8$ ; 2000s:  $n = 16$ )

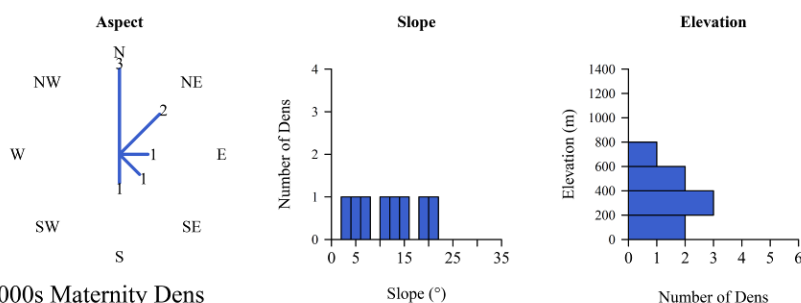


**Figure 4.23.** Boxplots comparing the first date on land (FDOL) of pregnant females in BB in the 1990s ( $n = 8$ ) and 2000s ( $n = 16$ ) (First FDOL used;  $p = 0.002$ ).

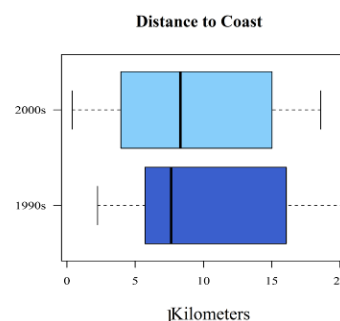
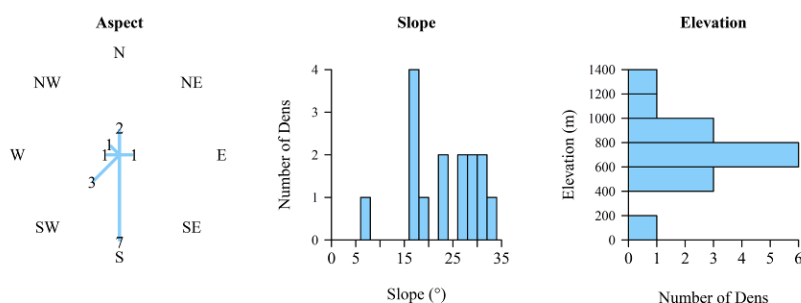


**Figure 4.24.** Plots comparing the aspect, slope, elevation, and distance to coast of the 1990s ( $n = 8$ ) and 2000s ( $n = 15$ ) maternity dens in Baffin Bay (the den on Greenland was omitted). The aspect plot consists of a compass face with lines marking the directions that dens faced. The lines are annotated with numbers noting how many dens were found at that aspect. Elevation and slope significantly differed between the two time periods ( $p = 0.003$ ), whereas no significant difference was detected for aspect ( $p = 0.392$ ) or distance to coast ( $p = 0.776$ ).

#### 1990s Maternity Dens

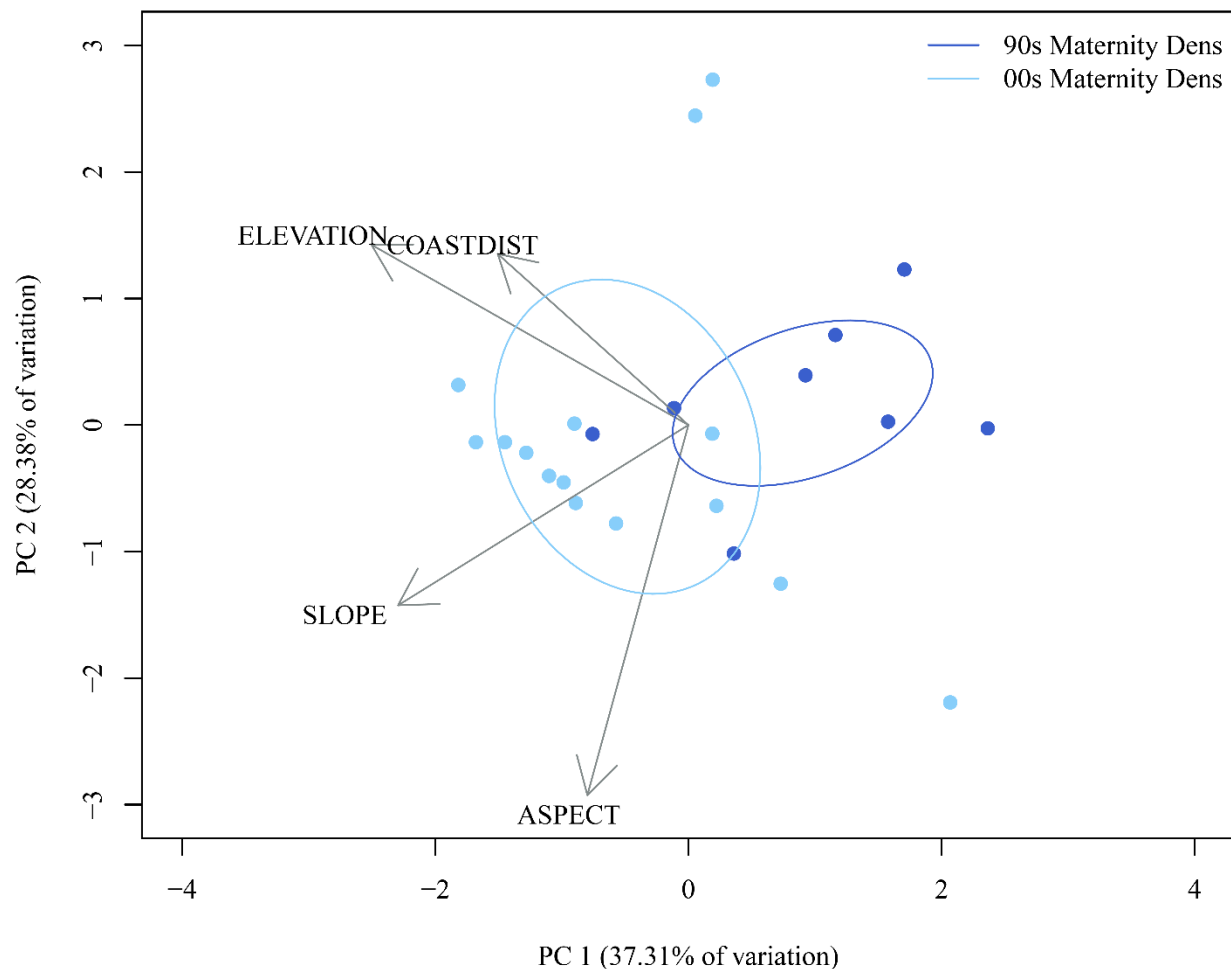


#### 2000s Maternity Dens





**Figure 4.25.** Biplot symbolizing the results for the principal component analysis (PCA) ordination of the Baffin Bay maternity dens and their habitat descriptors (elevation, slope, aspect, and distance to coast or ‘coastdist’), with ordiellipses drawn around year groups (1990s and 2000s; confidence level = 0.95). The 1990s dens ( $n = 8$ ) are symbolized by dark blue points and the light blue points are the 2000s dens ( $n = 15$ ; the Greenland maternity den was omitted).



## CHAPTER 5

### GENETIC MARK-RECAPTURE STUDY OF POLAR BEARS IN BAFFIN BAY

#### KEY FINDINGS

- 
- We used joint live-recapture and dead-recovery mark-recapture models to analyze data for the Baffin Bay (BB) polar bear subpopulation, with the goal of updating estimates of subpopulation size and survival. The dataset consisted of 914 physical captures 1993-1995 and 1997; 1,410 genetic samples obtained from biopsy darting 2011-2013; and 243 harvest returns of research-marked bears 1993-2013.
  - The mean estimate of total abundance of the BB subpopulation in 2012-2013 was 2,826 (95% CI = 2,059-3,593) polar bears. The mean estimate of total abundance 1994-1997 was 2,173 (95% CI = 1,252-3,093) bears, similar to the estimate reported by Taylor et al. (2005). Estimates of abundance for the 1990s and 2010s are not directly comparable due to changes in sampling design and environmental conditions.
  - The mean estimates of total (i.e., including harvest mortality) survival in 2011-2013 were 0.90 (SE = 0.05) for females age  $\geq 2$  years, and 0.78 (SE = 0.06) for males age  $2 \geq$  years. The time-constant estimate of total survival for a combined age class of cubs-of-the-year and yearlings, over the entire period 1993-2013, was 0.87 (SE = 0.06). Estimates of unharvested survival in 2011-2013 for females and males age  $\geq 2$  years were 0.91 (SE = 0.05) and 0.83 (SE = 0.06), respectively. Estimates of survival for both sexes may have included negative bias due to temporary emigration (see Chapter 3).
  - We performed a comparative assessment of sampling design and environmental conditions in the 1990s and 2010s to help interpret parameter estimates, quantify potential bias, and understand trends. An evaluation of the spatial distribution of onshore captures, together with data on habitat use from satellite telemetry, suggested that more systematic live-recapture sampling, including inland areas and the backs of fjords, occurred during 2011 – 2013 compared to the 1990s. Furthermore, offshore sea ice was available to polar bears during the annual sampling periods in the 1990s, but largely unavailable in the 2010s.
  - We created a geographic subset of the 2010s data based on the estimated sampling area from the 1990s to investigate the effects of sampling differences. Analyses suggested that geographically-restricted sampling such as occurred during the 1990s could result in approximately 10% negative bias in estimates of abundance. Furthermore, satellite telemetry data suggested that a potentially significant proportion of the BB subpopulation may have been located outside the sampling area or on the sea ice during mark-recapture sampling in the 1990s, although no sampling was conducted on the ice. This represents another potential source of negative bias in the 1990s abundance estimate although we were not able to quantify its magnitude.
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- Differences in sampling design and environmental conditions between the 1990s and 2010s introduced variable levels of heterogeneity into recapture probabilities. This heterogeneity was due in large part to the temporary emigration of bears from the sampling area, which was more pronounced in the 1990s (i.e., more bears were located farther inland, where there was no sampling, or on the sea ice). Although moderate levels of random temporary emigration are not problematic for mark-recapture models, high or variable levels of temporary emigration combined with short live-encounter sampling windows, or non-random temporary emigration, are well-known sources of bias. Our approach of including harvest returns in the same analytical framework as live-capture data likely mitigated bias to some extent. However, the BB data were too sparse to fit MR models that explicitly estimated temporary emigration and thus minimized its effects on parameters.
  - Considering statistical uncertainty in estimated parameters and evidence that the sampling design and environmental conditions likely resulted in an underestimate of abundance in the 1990s, it is not possible to conclude that the estimate of total abundance in the 2010s represents an increase in the size of the BB subpopulation. Although the 2010s abundance estimate represents the best-available information and is suitable for informing management, we cannot reliably determine the trend in subpopulation size over the 1993-2013 study period.
  - The 2011 – 2013 estimate of total survival for independent females is likely too low to support a stable subpopulation, although subsequent demographic modeling (e.g., population viability analysis integrating survival, recruitment, and harvest) is necessary to estimate observed and potential (i.e., in the absence of human-caused removals) subpopulation growth rates. The low estimates of total survival for independent males may warrant concern and further investigation. However, the short time-series of live-recapture data in the 1990s and 2010s, statistical uncertainty, and potential negative bias due to temporary emigration (such bias is generally most pronounced toward the end of a study) limit inference about trends in survival or the current status of the BB subpopulation based on estimated survival rates.
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## 5.1. Introduction

Sea-ice dynamics are rapidly changing across the circumpolar Arctic (Comiso et al. 2008, Stroeve et al. 2012), including the Baffin Bay region (Laidre et al. 2015), with a general trend toward reduced spatial extent and temporal availability of sea ice. These changes are expected to have negative impacts on sea ice dependent polar bears in the long-term (Atwood et al. 2015). In the near-term, the effects of sea-ice loss are expected to vary among subpopulations, with some of the earliest impacts anticipated in the seasonal ice subpopulations (Amstrup et al. 2008,

Stirling and Derocher 2012, Rode et al. 2012, 2014, Bromaghin et al. 2015, Obbard et al. 2015, Lunn et al. 2016).

The Baffin Bay (BB) polar bear subpopulation, located between Canada and Greenland, forms part of the seasonal ice ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008) and is characterized by the formation and near-complete melting of sea ice each year. These sea-ice dynamics force most bears to spend the low-ice (or ice-free) summer on land. In this region, the interval between the spring sea-ice retreat and the fall sea-ice advance has increased by ~12 days per decade since 1979 (Chapter 4, Laidre et al. 2015), suggesting that polar bears are likely experiencing reduced sea-ice availability during important spring and fall foraging periods. Rode et al. (2012) reported declining body condition in BB and suggested that this finding may be due to loss of sea-ice habitat.

Abundance of the BB subpopulation was estimated as 2,074 (95% CI= 1544 - 2604) bears based on a physical mark-recapture study conducted 1993 – 1997 (Taylor et al. 2005). Taylor et al. (2005) reported relatively high survival for subadult and adult females (ages 1 – 4: 0.90, SE= 0.045; ages 5 – 20: 0.94, SE= 0.021) and estimated an unharvested population growth rate ( $\lambda$ ) of 1.055 (SD: 0.01), suggesting strong potential for subpopulation growth relative to other demographic studies of polar bears (*cf.* Taylor et al. 2006, 2008, 2009). The combined Canada-Greenland harvest from BB was high during the early to mid-2000s ( $\bar{x}$ : 214 from 2001 – 2005, Chapter 8), and Peacock et al. (2012) reported lower survival rates in BB for the 2003 – 2009 period using harvest recoveries, although the estimated survival rates were characterized by high uncertainty and potential bias due to sparse data.

No new research has been conducted to update estimates of abundance since the 1993 – 1997 research, but projections using estimated abundance and vital rates from the 1990s (Taylor

et al. 2005) and reported harvest suggested a declining subpopulation and a projected abundance of ~1,550 bears as of 2004 (PBSG 2010). In addition, the IUCN / Polar Bear Specialist Group (2015) assessed BB to be declining based on 100% of population viability analysis (PVA) simulations resulting in a decline in abundance after 10 years, largely attributable to the effects of harvest. In the absence of an updated demographic and ecological assessment, there has been considerable uncertainty about the current abundance and status of polar bears in BB. Given the large-scale environmental changes occurring in Baffin Bay and concerns regarding previous and current harvest levels, there was a need for new information on subpopulation status (Chapter 1).

Our objective was to obtain updated estimates of abundance and, to the extent possible, vital rates including survival for polar bears in the BB subpopulation. These estimates, combined with information on sea-ice dynamics, polar bear movements, reproductive output, body condition, and other ecological metrics, will be used to assess subpopulation status, develop management plans, and inform subsistence harvest levels. To address our objectives, we conducted a 3-year genetic mark-recapture study during 2011 – 2013. These data were analyzed together with data from physical mark-recapture research (1993 – 1995, 1997). Harvest recoveries were incorporated throughout the 21-year (1993 – 2013) study period, but no live recapture sampling occurred during the 13-year interval from 1998 – 2010.

To address concerns regarding the potential impacts of immobilization and handling on wildlife and better reflect values of northern Canadian communities, the Canada-Greenland Joint Commission on Polar Bears elected to use genetic, rather than physical, mark-recapture methods (Chapter 1). This work is part of a broad, inter-jurisdictional initiative to develop less-invasive methods (i.e., compared to physical capture) to study polar bear subpopulations. Whereas use of aerial surveys has become increasingly widespread for polar bears (e.g., Aars et al. 2009,

Stapleton et al. 2014, 2016, Obbard et al. 2015), genetic mark-recapture has not been implemented at large spatial scales. However, genetic mark-recapture is an established technique that has been used in wildlife studies for decades (e.g., Palsbøll et al. 1997, Boersen et al. 2003, Boulanger et al. 2004), including small-scale studies of polar bears (Herreman and Peacock 2013). This study and concurrent research in the neighboring Kane Basin subpopulation (Chapter 10) represent the first subpopulation-scale applications of genetic mark-recapture for assessment of a polar bear subpopulation.

## **5.2. Materials and Methods**

### **Study Area**

The boundaries of the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation (BB) encompass an area ~1 million km<sup>2</sup> in Baffin Bay, covering portions of Baffin Island and all Bylot Island (66.2° N to 73.8° N) in Nunavut/ Canada and parts of West and Northwest Greenland (66.0° N to 77.0° N; Taylor et al. 2005; Figure 5.1). BB is bounded by Greenland to the east, Baffin and Bylot islands to the west, the North Water polynya to the north and Davis Strait to the south. Three communities in Nunavut and 37 communities in Greenland harvest bears from BB, although the majority of the Greenland harvest is taken between *ca.* 72° and 76° N.

Baffin Bay is ice covered in winter but typically ice free in summer. During late spring and summer break-up, sea ice recedes from Greenland westward across Baffin Bay. The last remnants of ice typically occur off the coast of Baffin Island. Most polar bears remain on the sea ice as it recedes and then come ashore to spend the ice-retreat period on Baffin and Bylot islands (Taylor et al. 2005), although an unquantified but probably small number remains on land in northwestern Greenland throughout the ice-retreat period (see Chapter 4). Sea ice in Baffin Bay

has decreased markedly during the last few decades (Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Peacock et al. 2012, Laidre et al. 2015), with earlier spring break up and later fall formation. During the 1990s, some sea ice remained in offshore Baffin Bay during summer and was used by bears; this remnant ice was largely unavailable to polar bears in the 2010s (Chapters 3 and 4). The east coasts of Baffin and Bylot islands are characterized by high topographic relief and deep, steep-sided fjords, creating difficult conditions in which to sample bears.

Movement data of satellite-collared bears (Taylor et al. 2001), genetic analyses (e.g., Paetkau et al. 1999, Peacock et al. 2015), and recaptures and harvest recoveries of research-marked bears (Taylor and Lee 1995) have been used to evaluate subpopulation delineation between BB and other subpopulations in the Canadian and Greenlandic Arctic. Taylor et al. (2001) reported some sub-structuring of BB on a north-south gradient, and genetic analyses suggest a lack of genetic differentiation between BB from the adjacent Kane Basin subpopulation to the north, but a significant genetic difference between BB and the Davis Strait subpopulation (Paetkau et al. 1999, Peacock et al. 2015). These findings were corroborated by analyses of recent samples from BB, KB, DS and Lancaster Sound (see Chapter 2). Although some interchange occurs among BB and adjacent subpopulations including Davis Strait, Lancaster Sound and Kane Basin (e.g., Taylor et al. 2001, Chapter 3), the BB subpopulation is considered a distinct demographic unit for management purposes.

### Mark-Recapture Sampling Design

Mark-recapture sampling of polar bears in BB has occurred over three periods. Early field sampling was conducted during the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 5.2) but restricted to spring-time captures on landfast ice (i.e., ice occurring nearshore; Taylor et al. 2005). Because this

early sampling occurred in a different season (i.e., spring versus fall) and was spatially more variable and restricted than later sampling, we excluded early data (1970s and 1980s) from the present analyses. In addition, lack of tissue samples from early sampling precluded genetic identification, a primary method used in the current study. More systematic capture-based sampling occurred during fall ice-free seasons in 1993–1995 and 1997, but there was no fall sampling in 1996 due to logistical and resource constraints (Taylor et al. 2005).

We completed a recent fall-time sampling session (August – October) from 2011 to 2013. This session differed from sampling in the 1990s in several important ways. First, sampling was conducted by biopsy darting to obtain tissue for genotyping individuals, rather than via physical capture and tagging. Second, new information obtained via satellite telemetry on the movements and spatial distribution of bears in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin, collected during the 1990s sampling session and during 2009 – 2010, was used to improve study design, with the objective of improving sampling coverage of the BB subpopulation and thereby reducing heterogeneity in recapture probabilities. In Baffin Bay, heterogeneity during fall sampling is likely to result primarily from the spatial distribution of bears in relation to sampling effort. Although bears are concentrated along the Baffin Island coast during the ice-free season, some individuals travel significant distances inland, move to higher elevations, or remain on offshore ice where access for sampling is difficult (Ferguson et al. 1997, 2000, Taylor et al. 2001, Chapter 4). Bears also may segregate by age and reproductive status. For example, adult females with cubs tend to select fjords, avoiding offshore islands and coastal regions where densities of adult males are higher (Ferguson et al. 1997; Chapter 4), and pregnant bears select inland and upland denning habitats where they are less available for capture (Chapter 4).



Although Taylor et al. (2005:205) reported that search effort during the 1990s was uniform and systematic across the coastal regions, islands, and inland reaches of Baffin Island, examination of the satellite telemetry data from adult female polar bears collared in the 1990s indicated an under-representation of bears in fjords and inland regions and offshore pack ice (see Chapter 3). This finding suggested that capture effort during the 1990s was concentrated on islands, along the coastline, and near the mouths of fjords (Figure 5.3). This pattern was particularly noticeable in central and northern Baffin Island, where no captures were recorded beyond the mouths of fjords during the entire study period. We conclude that sampling was spatially restricted to a portion of the subpopulation's fall range during the 1990s, thus potentially increasing heterogeneity in recapture probabilities, which can bias estimates of subpopulation size and demographic parameters.

Analysis of the 1990s telemetry data also showed that a potentially significant proportion of collared bears remained on offshore sea ice during the fall onshore sampling period (see Chapter 3). The proportion of collared bears present in the sampled area each year was estimated based on the total number of collars that were transmitting during the capture sampling period. To evaluate movements and fidelity with respect to the onshore sampling area in years  $t + 1, 2, \dots, k$ , we only used data from bears that were captured in the onshore sampling area and fitted with collars during year  $t$  (i.e., we excluded data from the year of capture, because bears were captured onshore and their locations following capture were not random). In addition to the mark-recapture sampling in the fall, some bears were captured and fitted with collars in the spring. Data from bears captured in spring of year  $t$  were incorporated into summaries of movement and fidelity for fall of year  $t$ .

During the 1990s, there were three years with telemetry data available during mark-recapture sampling (1993 – 1995). In those years, 0 – 23% of collared bears transmitting during the sampling period ( $n = 1 - 13$  collared bears / year) were present in the sampling area. By contrast, during the 2010s, 67 – 85% of collared bears were present in the sampling area during the sampling period ( $n = 6 - 12$  collared bears / year) (see Chapter 3). Although sample sizes are small and telemetry data are limited to adult females, this finding suggests that seasonal fidelity to the sampling area changed significantly between the two mark-recapture sampling periods. This follows well with the change observed in the sea-ice habitat during those periods (Chapter 4). Further investigation showed that a substantial portion of 1990s adult females outfitted with satellite collars were on the offshore pack ice of Baffin Island or on remnant ice around Lancaster Sound and Devon Island. In contrast, there was little sea-ice habitat available in summer during the 2010s, and bears were concentrated on Baffin Island and Northwest Greenland. Polar bears that used offshore sea ice during the 1990s were unavailable for capture, and to the extent that individual bears consistently used offshore sea ice throughout the 1990s sampling period, these bears would not have been enumerated in the subpopulation estimate. These issues were less problematic during the 2010s due to the expanded onshore sampling area and the lower availability of offshore sea ice.

For sampling on Baffin and Bylot islands during 2011 – 2013, we defined sampling strata to guide effort and improve survey coverage and efficiency. Stratification primarily was based on satellite telemetry data obtained from adult female polar bears collared during fall and spring along eastern Baffin Island (1993-1997) and in spring in W and NW Greenland in 2009 and 2010. We summarized location data by proximity to the coastline and used the proportion of locations in different inland zones (e.g., 0 – 5 km inland, 5 – 10 km inland) to inform

stratification. We delineated a high-density stratum including the coastline and offshore islands, extending 5 km inland; a moderate-density stratum including inland regions 5 – 10 km from the coastline; and a low-density stratum extending up to 30 km inland (Figure 5.4). We attempted to allocate roughly 65%, 25%, and 10% of helicopter search effort in the high-, moderate-, and low-density strata, respectively, to efficiently sample the study area. We set *a priori* guidelines to systematically distribute inland search effort along the entirety of the islands.

It was not feasible to sample bears that may have remained on offshore ice floes in either decade. However, long-term trends in sea-ice conditions in Baffin Bay have resulted in significant reductions in offshore ice during the fall in the 2010s, relative to the 1990s (Laidre et al. 2015; see Chapter 4). Thus, the presence of bears on offshore ice during the recent sampling session was considerably reduced (*cf.* Chapter 3 Figures 3.18, 3.19, and 3.20). Additionally, using real-time data on sea ice (see Field Methods below) and the location of telemetry-instrumented bears, sampling during the 2011 – 2013 period was timed to coincide with the period when sea-ice cover was at a minimum and most collared bears were on land.

Various sources of information including traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), expedition reports and unpublished data (Born 1995, Born et al. 2011, GINR unpublished data) indicate that an unquantified but presumably small number of bears in the BB subpopulation spend the summer in the Qimmusseriarsuaq / Melville Bay area of Northwest Greenland, rather than moving with the retreating sea ice and summering on Baffin and Bylot islands (see also Chapter 2). To account for this portion of the subpopulation, we extended our sampling efforts to include this region during fall (Figure 5.4). Because satellite telemetry indicated that polar bears were not present during fall in the Melville Bay region in the 1990s (Taylor et al. 2001), NW Greenland was not sampled during fall during the 1990 physical mark-recapture study

(Taylor et al. 2005). In sum, study design for 2011 – 2013 was intended to (1) maximize sample size; (2) sample bears across the known seasonal range of the subpopulation; (3) efficiently allocate sampling effort based on expected densities across the study area; and (4) accommodate the spatial segregation of sex, age, and reproductive classes. These considerations are important to reducing potential bias in estimates of demographic parameters, particularly abundance, from mark-recapture studies (Pollock et al. 1990, Williams et al. 2002).

### Field Methods

Capture, sampling, aging, and data collection protocols for bears marked during 1993 – 1995 and 1997 are described in Taylor et al. (2005). For genetic mark-recapture sampling from 2011 – 2013, field work was timed to coincide with minimum sea-ice cover in Baffin Bay based on Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) satellite imagery (<https://worldview.earthdata.nasa.gov>) and Canadian Ice Service maps (August – October in all years). The locations of collared bears were also reviewed prior to field work to confirm the timing and location of bears coming ashore. During field sampling, locations of collared bears were not reviewed and telemetry equipment was not used to help locate bears.

In Nunavut (Canada), sampling in 2011 – 2013 was conducted via remote biopsy darting (Pagano et al. 2014) using two helicopters (Bell 206 LongRangers). The helicopters began sampling at opposite ends of the study area; one proceeding north to south, and the other south to north until they overlapped. We sampled Baffin and Bylot islands from September 4 – October 14, 2011; August 26 – September 29, 2012; and August 20 – October 11, 2013. With the exception of 1993 (August 23 – October 8), sampling started and ended earlier than research in the 1990s. Approximately 300 hours of total helicopter flying time was allocated each year,

including travel time to and from daily start points and refueling caches. To the extent possible, effort was allocated according to the *a priori* stratification and criteria noted previously.

However, we modified sampling where necessary based on terrain and weather conditions that limited access to some areas. Flight paths during searches were recorded via GPS to facilitate *post-hoc* assessment of the distribution of search effort. We made a concerted effort to search inland and at high elevations. We searched most fjords along their entire lengths and a majority (>95%) of offshore islands.

As outlined above, a small number of polar bears summer in the Melville Bay area of NW Greenland (e.g., Born et al. 2011), and we also searched these areas to collect biopsies. The areas between 74° 34' N and 76° 46' N (i.e., Melville Bay *sensu lato*) were searched during 4-11 September 2012 and 7-17 September 2013 (a total of nearly 60 hours of active on-effort search) using an AS350 Ecureuil B3 helicopter. Coastlines, mountain sides, inland nunataks, glacier fronts and most offshore islands up to 40 km from the coast were searched. On each flight, three dedicated observers and the pilot searched for bears; and on several flights, a local polar bear hunter assisted in the search. Flight paths were recorded using GPS.

In 2011, we initially tested two types of biopsy dart to assess reliability and the quality of samples yielded (Figure 5.5). The Pneudart DNA dart (Pneudart Inc., Williamsport, USA) was highly reliable at yielding good quality tissue samples (95% success). In contrast, the Pneudart Biopsy dart was unreliable (<50% success), although it did provide good quality samples when successfully deployed. Consequently, we used DNA darts exclusively during the remainder of the field work. Biopsy darting was quick and minimally invasive; the time between spotting a bear and obtaining a sample was typically < 2 minutes. Since bears were not chemically immobilized, they could be safely darted in locations that would have been unsuitable for capture

due to the risks of drowning or falling. The only exception was for bears sighted in the water. Most bears found in water were directed to land before darting since the darts do not float well. A small number of bears were darted while still in the water using Pseudart DNA Marker darts, which float for a short time in calm waters and may be retrieved.

Bears showed little or no reaction to the impact of a biopsy dart, and no visible mark was left in most cases. Immediately after darting, each bear was allowed to move away from the helicopter before the dart was retrieved. Darts were coated in fluorescent paint to aid retrieval. When working in deep snow, we also rolled a length (~ 20 cm) of flagging tape around the shaft of each dart. This tape unrolled during flight and helped in locating darts when they sank into the snow. Because biopsy darts leave no visible mark, there was potential for repeated sampling of the same individuals within a single field season. To minimize duplicate sampling, daily searches were limited to areas not previously searched. Where possible, we used natural barriers to polar bear movements for the purpose of delineating daily break points in search effort. When sampling members of a family group consisting of an adult female with cubs-of-the-year or yearlings, the 1 to 3 dependent young with each mother were distinguished based on differences in size or other features (e.g., marks on fur) to avoid sampling the same individual twice. When it was not possible to distinguish between cubs, we used DNA-Marker darts to distinguish among litter mates. This dart takes a tissue sample and leaves a temporary dye mark that can be used to distinguish sampled from non-sampled individuals.

A limitation of biopsy darting was the challenge of sampling cubs-of-the-year. Although many cubs were large enough to be sampled, doing so involved a risk of separating them from their mother. Unlike physical capture methods, in which the adult female is first immobilized and can be used as an ‘anchor point’ around which cubs are captured, members of a family group

that are being biopsy darted may move in opposite directions. With the rugged and steep terrain along Baffin and Bylot islands and Melville Bay, cubs can quickly lose sight of their mother and are at risk of injury or separation. For these reasons, only about half of the cubs-of-the-year that we encountered during 2011 – 2013 were biopsy darted, although we recorded the sighting of all individual cubs for calculating proportions of females with cubs and mean litter sizes.

Following retrieval, darts were checked to ensure they contained a suitable tissue sample. Each sample was divided into two parts for storage and labelled with a unique biopsy number. Samples were initially stored cooled or frozen. Samples sent for DNA extraction were taped onto an absorbent card, placed into individual envelopes and later oven dried for submission, or stored in vials with DMSO. For each bear encountered, we recorded GPS coordinates and data on location, weather conditions, habitat, behavior, body condition (thin, average, and obese bears; see Stirling et al. 2008), group size, and estimated age-class and sex.

We remotely estimated sex and age class (cub-of-the-year, yearling, subadult [ages 2 – 4], and adult) from the air at a range of 3 – 7 m above ground. Sex was later confirmed via genetic analysis. In estimating age-class and sex, the observer used multiple cues, including the size of an individual relative to its environment or accompanying bears, membership in a family group (mothers and cubs or yearlings), secondary sexual characteristics (adult males), body shape and proportions, presence of scars (which are most often seen on adult males) and observations of urination (i.e., urine dribbling from under the tail in females). Field notes assisted in *post-hoc* reassessment of age-sex class once genetic sex was known. Age-class was later verified for some bears from other encounter records in which the individual was captured and physically examined, or by using genetic identification to assign membership to a known

family group (Appendix B). We were able to assess the accuracy of estimating age-class and sex of polar bears using this sample of known age-class bears (Appendix B).

### Harvest recoveries

We assembled data from bears killed in the harvest or as problem bears during the 1993 - 2013 study period. Between 1993 and 2010, recoveries of research-marked bears in the harvest were detected by the return of ear tags and / or lip tattoos from hunters in Canada and Greenland. Between 2011 and 2013, recoveries of bears that were physically tagged or genetically marked (i.e., without physical tags) were detected by the return of ear tags or lip tattoos (and satellite radios in Greenland); or from genetic monitoring of harvest (i.e., genotyping of harvested bears). Although we expected a majority of bears marked in Baffin Bay to remain within BB, previous studies of tag recoveries in the harvest and satellite telemetry suggest that some bears emigrate from the subpopulation (Stirling et al. 1980, Taylor and Lee 1995, Taylor et al. 2001, Taylor et al. 2005). To account for marked individuals that were harvested outside BB (Burnham 1993), samples were collected from bears harvested in Baffin Bay as well as all surrounding subpopulations (Lancaster Sound, Kane Basin, Gulf of Boothia and Davis Strait, Foxe Basin; Burnham 1993). For each harvested bear, data including age, sex, date and location of kill were recorded. Canada's quota-based mandatory harvest reporting system was in place throughout the 1993 – 2013 research period. Greenland implemented a quota system and made improvements to the reporting system in the mid-2000s and, in 2012, instituted a mandatory harvest reporting system for collection of a tissue sample and premolar tooth for age determination (Appendix D).

### Genetic Analysis



To identify bears physically marked (with ear tags and lip tattoos) during the 1990s that survived and were subsequently encountered during the genetic mark-recapture session (2011-13), we genotyped tissue samples from all bears sampled in the 1990s except: 1) bears that were recorded as harvested between 1993 and 2011, 2) bears whose known or estimated age would have been greater than 35 years in 2011, and 3) 33 bears that met the above 2 criteria, but lacked tissue samples. In total, this dataset consisted of 650 individuals marked in the 1990s that would have been  $\leq 35$  years old and had not been harvested by the time genetic sampling began in 2011; the 33 bears lacking tissue samples were assigned to unique attribute groups to acknowledge they were unavailable for genetic recapture during the 2011-2013 sampling period (see below).

Dried biopsy samples and harvest specimens (frozen or in ethanol) were sent to Wildlife Genetics International (Nelson, B.C., Canada) for analysis using protocols previously validated for bears (Kendall et al. 2009). DNA was extracted from  $\sim 3\text{mm}^2$  pieces of tissue with QIAGEN DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kits (<http://www.qiagen.com/>). Most samples consisted of a plug of a skin and sub-cutaneous tissue, which provided ample material for DNA extraction and residual tissue for future analyses. In a small proportion of cases, the available sample consisted of a tuft of hair. DNA was extracted from hair samples using approximately 10 guard hair roots or 30 pieces of underfur. In a few cases, where a biopsy sample contained no visible tissue, DNA was successfully extracted by soaking the barbed needle from the biopsy dart in the lysis mix (QIAGEN buffer ATL + proteinase K).

To select markers for the analysis of individual identity, we used allele frequency data from 1,771 polar bears for which complete 20-locus genotypes existed before the genetic mark-recapture study began (Government of Nunavut, unpublished data). We ranked the 20

microsatellite markers in the dataset by expected heterozygosity. The 8 most variable markers that could be analyzed together in a single sequencer lane were selected for use. These surpassed the required standard for marker variability ( $HE = 0.80$ ; Paetkau 2003). In addition to the 8 microsatellite markers, we analyzed sex on every sample, using a *ZFX/ZFY* marker. This 9th marker roughly halved the match probability (assuming a balanced sex ratio), even for close relatives, as well as providing replication of sex data for individuals that were sampled more than once.

The analysis of individual identity followed a 3-phase approach. Phase 1 was a first pass of all extracted samples using the 9 selected markers (*G10B*, *CXX20*, *G10H*, *G10P*, *145P07*, *MU50*, *MU59*, *G10X* and *ZFX/ZFY*). Samples that failed at  $> 6$  of 9 markers on the first pass were set aside and did not proceed further in the analyses. Previous experience has shown that such samples are prone to errors and run out of DNA before generating a complete (phase 2) and reproducible (phase 3) genotype (D. Paetkau, pers. comm.).

The first pass was followed by a cleanup phase in which data points that were weak or difficult to read the first time were re-analyzed. During cleanup we used 5  $\mu$ L of DNA per reaction instead of the 3  $\mu$ L was used during first pass. At the conclusion of the cleanup phase, the remaining samples (99.5%) had high-confidence scores for all 9 markers. In cases where the genetic sex result contradicted the reported sex based on field assessment, genetic sex was checked using a second independent marker (*amelogenin*; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7695123>), thus confirming the results, and ruling out the possibility that a mutation at a particular marker was to blame. In all cases, results from the second marker confirmed that the field data was the source of error.

The third and final phase of analysis was error-checking, following the published protocol of reanalyzing the mismatching markers in highly similar pairs of genotypes (Paetkau 2003). This error-check included genotypes from the 4,657 polar bears in the database, plus published data from 473 individuals (Paetkau et al. 1999). The error-checking protocol functions on the principle that when  $\geq 2$  samples are genotyped from a given individual, and when 1 of those genotypes contains an error, the result is a pair of genotypes that match at all-but-1 marker (a '1MMpair'). Less commonly, 2MM-pairs are created when 2 errors have been made in the genotypes of the samples from a given individual.

An important distinction with this protocol is that it is designed to ensure accurate individual ID, and has been proven to do so with a high degree of efficiency (Kendall et al. 2009), but it is not intended or expected to correct errors when just 1 sample has been genotyped from a given individual. In addition to re-analyzing mismatching markers this protocol also involved the inclusion of additional markers for some samples. Finally, we searched the dataset for genotype matches that seemed unlikely based on our field data. In each case, 3 extra markers were added to the genotypes to lower the probability of chance matches between individuals. The extra loci confirmed all of these matches. Once the genotyping and error-checking was complete, we defined an individual for each unique 9-locus genotype.

In total, 1610 biopsy samples (99.2% of those submitted for analysis) were successfully extracted and genotyped. A further 868 samples (99.3% of those submitted) from bears harvested in BB and surrounding subpopulations 1993-2013 were genotyped successfully, with success defined as satisfying the lab's visual and peak-height criteria for high-confidence scoring at each of the 9 markers.

In addition to the genotyping errors that were targeted during error-checking, DNA-based datasets are prone to a second source of error, when match probabilities are so high that some individuals have identical genotypes. Calculated match probabilities provide no practical insight into the risk of sampling individuals with matching genotypes, because the calculations are so dependent on the assumptions made about the degree of relatedness among the sampled individuals. We therefore used the direct, empirical approach of extrapolation from the observed mismatch curve (Figure 5.6). We expect to see roughly order-of-magnitude decreases in the number of pairs of individuals whose genotypes match at increasing numbers of markers (Paetkau 2003). In our dataset the slope of this curve was reasonably true to that rule of thumb. From this curve, it is estimated that we would have sampled ~ 0.3 0MM-pairs (individuals whose genotypes matched at 9 markers) in this multiyear dataset of 4,657 individuals; a very small risk of error in proportion to the size of the dataset. In addition to reducing the risk of sampling individuals with the same genotype, another benefit to having such a powerful marker system was realized during error-checking, where the amount of time required to reanalyze the mismatching markers underlying 1MM- and 2MM pairs was trivial in proportion to the scale of the project, because there were so few such pairs.

### Statistical Analysis

We used the Burnham (1993) model in Program MARK (Cooch and White 2015) to analyze joint live-recapture and dead-recovery data from the 21-year (1993 – 2013) study period in BB. The Burnham model is an extension of the Cormack-Jolly-Seber live encounter model that facilitates the inclusion of dead-recovery data (i.e., combining the CJS model with the Brownie-Seber dead-recovery model) and estimates survival probability ( $S$ ; the probability of

surviving interval  $t$  to  $t+1$ ), recapture probability ( $p$ ; the probability of live-recapturing a marked animal), dead reporting probability ( $r$ ; the probability that a bear is killed by humans and reported to authorities), and fidelity ( $F$ ; the probability that a bear does not permanently emigrate from the sampling area, and is therefore available for capture in future years). The inclusion of dead recoveries allows for estimation of true survival (i.e., a biological survival rate that does not include permanent emigration), because whereas live-encounter models only measure the probability of remaining alive and within the live-recapture area, the inclusion of dead recoveries from throughout Greenland and Canada in the Burnham model allow for estimation of true survival independent of potential emigration. More importantly, inclusion of dead recovery data increased the amount of information available on the fates of individual bears in the BB subpopulation, likely decreased susceptibility to bias because the sampling mechanism for dead recoveries was different from live-recapture sampling, and allowed us to estimate survival during intervening years between live-recapture periods (i.e., 1998-2010; Peacock et al. 2012). Similarly, with respect to dead-recovery models, live recaptures provide large amounts of additional data, allowing for more precise estimation of survival than would be possible using dead recoveries only (Cooch and White 2015).

Estimates of demographic parameters from mark-recapture studies may be impacted by temporary emigration (e.g., Peñaloza et al. 2014). Completely random temporary emigration is generally reflected in the parameter  $p$  for long-term studies (i.e., the probability of recapture reflects both the probability that an individual is in the sampling area on a given occasion, and the probability that the individual will be recaptured conditional on being in the sampling area; Burnham 1993, Barker and White 2001). However, for shorter studies with high or variable rates of temporary emigration, especially when the probability of temporary emigrants remaining

outside the study area is non-random (e.g., if the probability of being an emigrant at sampling occasion  $t$ , depends on emigration status at sampling occasion  $t-1$ ) the parameter  $S$  may be susceptible to bias as well. Bias typically increases toward the end of the study, and is referred to as terminal bias, because bears that leave the study area during the final years have no opportunity to return and be resampled, and thus cannot be distinguished from individuals that died or emigrated permanently (Peñaloza et al. 2014). Such terminal bias can suggest spurious correlations with environmental covariates, particularly for short studies, if habitat quality declines toward the end of the study and there is concurrent terminal bias (Devineau et al. 2006). With the Burnham model, the inclusion of dead recovery data can mitigate these issues to some extent (Peacock et al. 2012), as can formal incorporation of telemetry data (Peñaloza et al. 2014). More complex mark-recapture approaches are available that can theoretically model temporary emigration with respect to the sampling area, further mitigating potential bias (e.g., the Barker model, Barker and White 2001; multistate models with unobservable states, Schaub et al. 2004). However, these models require large datasets and can be difficult to fit in practice (Converse et al. 2009). We conducted simulations in Program MARK (White and Burnham 1999) and determined that existing mark-recapture data from BB were inadequate for measuring temporary emigration (i.e., the  $F$  and  $F'$  parameters in the Barker model, or the  $a''$  and  $a'$  parameters in the Barker robust design). Simulations suggested that, using the Burnham model, adult survival ( $S$ ) and recapture ( $p$ ) probabilities were relatively unbiased in the presence of low to moderate levels of random temporary emigration, under which conditions the estimates of  $p$  reflected the product of recapture probability and presence on the study area (T. Arnold, unpubl. data). Simulations suggested that if temporary emigration was non-random or temporally variable, survival rates would be negatively biased (especially if dead recovery rates were low, as for adult females);

however, the product of capture probability and presence on the study area exhibited relatively small bias, the directionality of which tended to underestimate abundance.

Whereas live-capture sessions are assumed to be instantaneous, dead recoveries may occur year-round between the live-capture sampling periods. For the BB data, there was some temporal overlap of live recapture and dead recovery periods, but the assumption of non-overlap between live and dead recovery periods was generally met. We considered harvests prior to August 31 in year  $t$  as occurring after the live recapture sampling period in year  $t - 1$ , whereas harvests after September 1 were assumed to have occurred after live-recapture sampling in year  $t$ . This coding protocol resulted in no instances of bears being coded as harvested before being observed alive during the sampling period in year  $t$ .

We analyzed data and built models in Program MARK (White and Burnham 1999). We set up the analysis using a Barker modeling framework to provide flexibility if the data proved sufficient to model temporary emigration, but initially constrained parameters of the Barker model to correspond to the simpler Burnham model (i.e., we fixed the following parameters to 0:  $F'(i)$  [the probability a bear not at risk of capture in  $i$  is at risk of capture in period  $i + 1$ ],  $R(i)$  [the probability that a bear surviving from occasion  $i$  to  $i + 1$  is resighted alive between  $i$  and  $i + 1$ ], and  $R'(i)$  [the probability that a bear dies during  $i$  to  $i + 1$  without being reported dead is resighted alive between  $i$  and  $i + 1$  before its death; Barker 1997, 1999). This approach allowed for the possibility of altering model structures, in the event that we elected to explicitly model temporary emigration ( $F'$ ) or wanted to simulate the consequences of constraining this parameter to 0, rather than allowing random temporary emigration to be incorporated in the parameter  $p$  (Burnham 1993, Barker 1997, 1999). We included harvest data through 2013 and compiled individual capture histories with the live capture and dead encounter data.

Whereas researchers during the 1990s study period were able to estimate age by physical examination and by counting annular rings on a bear's extracted premolar (Calvert and Ramsay 1998), we did not physically capture bears during 2011 – 2013, and individual age classes were assessed from the air. As such, there was uncertainty in our assignment of bears to age classes (Appendix B). Hence, during mark-recapture modeling we elected to simplify age structure relative to previous work (*cf.* Taylor et al. 2005), resulting in the following age classes: cubs-of-the-year (*coy*), yearlings (*yrl*), and individuals  $\geq 2$  years old (*age 2+*). Dependent young (*coy* and *yrl*) were assumed to be aged without error because of clear differences in the body size of these two age classes.

We identified a limited number of candidate sub-model structures for the parameters  $S$ ,  $p$ ,  $r$ , and  $F$  in the Burnham model. Because we expected that survival would vary among age classes (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005), we incorporated age structure in all 10 candidate sub-models (Table 5.1). We hypothesized that survival of *coy* would differ from *yrl* and thus constructed a three age-class structure (*coy*, *yrl*, *age 2+*). Because many of the *coy* that were sighted during the 2011-2013 sampling period were not biopsy darted, we also examined a two age-class structure in which *coy* and *yrl* were pooled for estimation of  $S$ . We hypothesized that the sexes would differ in  $S$  for the *age 2+* class, primarily due to sex-selective harvest (2:1 male-to-female harvest ratio), but not for *coy* and *yrl* since they are dependent on their mothers for survival. Given sparseness of data, we examined time-constant structures for  $S$ , and a structure allowing temporal variation in adult survival across three sampling epochs corresponding to the live recapture and dead recovery periods (i.e., 1993 – 1997, 1998 – 2010, and 2011 – 2013). We did not have a biological reason to suspect that temporal changes in survival aligned with these sampling epochs (e.g., that survival exhibited a step change between 1997 and 1998). This structure



aligned with changes in sampling design and available information on changes in bear movements, and allowed assessment of whether estimates of  $S$  varied whether they were based on combined data (epochs 1 and 3) or dead recoveries only (epoch 2). We specified the time-constant and epoch-based structures for  $S$  by constraining the design matrix in Program MARK, while maintaining full temporal structure on adult survival within the parameter index matrices (PIMs). This approach facilitated modeling of environmental covariates (see below) and future use of random effect models or Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) approaches to explore annual variation in survival (Cooch and White 2015).

We created two annual covariates, *ice transition* and *ice area* (both standardized about the mean and standard deviation) to explore relationships between  $S$  and environmental conditions. First, we hypothesized that the duration of the summer sea-ice transition period over the continental shelf of BB (*ice transition*; i.e., the time between break-up and freeze-up; see Chapter 4 for description of derivation of sea-ice metrics) would have a negative relationship with survival for the age 2+ classes, such that increasing duration of the ice transition period would be correlated with decreasing survival (e.g., Regehr et al. 2007). Similarly, we hypothesized that the area of ice over the continental shelf of the BB subpopulation during late spring (*ice area*; mean area of sea ice during May and June) would have a positive relationship with survival of age 2+ bears. Duration of the ice transition period and ice area over the continental shelf increased and decreased, respectively, during the 21-year study period (*ice transition*:  $\beta = 2.7$  (days),  $t = 3.1$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ; *ice area*:  $\beta = -1,362$  (km<sup>2</sup>),  $t = -4.2$ ,  $P < 0.001$ : -0.70). Because we did not sample many coy during 2011 – 2013 and we could only estimate survival from 7 cohorts, data were insufficient to explore relationships between time-varying covariates and the survival of dependent bears.

Preliminary analyses suggested a positive relationship between age 2+ female survival and duration of the sea-ice transition period. However, we believe this finding was an artifact of study design. No live recapture sampling occurred in 1996, which coincided with the heaviest observed sea-ice conditions during the period 1993-2013 (mean<sub>1993-2013</sub>: 190 days; 1996: 129 days; standardized effect size: -2.18). Furthermore, the following year 1997 was the last year of live-capture data and the proportion of adult females in the sample was low compared to previous years, which we hypothesized was due to the higher levels of temporary emigration in the 1990s associated with limited geographic sampling and the availability of offshore sea ice (see Chapter 3). The combination of extreme environmental conditions in 1996, lack of live-capture sampling in 1996 and 1998-2009, and auxiliary data suggesting high levels of temporary emigration and nonrandom sampling in the 1990s led us to the conclusion that the data were likely insufficient to evaluate year-to-year variation in survival, especially toward the end of 1990s live-capture sampling. We explored the relationships between environmental covariates and  $S$  in other years by setting the 1996 value of standardized covariates to 0 (i.e., the standardized mean), and found there was not a significant relationship between sea ice and female survival. Based on these considerations we excluded sea-ice metrics from further consideration for evaluating temporal variation in  $S$ , although we explored the robustness of these results using additional post hoc analyses (see Discussion).

We created 12 candidate structures to model recapture probability (Table 5.2). We modeled coy to have the same  $p$  as females, since they remain in family groups as yearlings and are recaptured with their mothers. However, we hypothesized that  $p$  of age 2+ males (including  $p$  of male yearlings, recaptured at age 2 after break-up of family groups) would differ due to spatial segregation of bears onshore by sex and age classes (Taylor et al. 2005), and we included

this two-group structure for  $p$  (*family*, including 2+ females and dependent young; and age 2+ males) in all candidate sub-models. We evaluated two candidate structures for temporal variability in  $p$ : 1) given differences in sampling protocols, search effort and survey teams between the 1990s and 2000s,  $p$  was allowed to differ between the 1990s and 2010s live-capture sampling epochs (additive or interactive effects with family); and 2) a fully-time varying structure (additive with family) for  $p$  (i.e., allowing for year-to-year variability), given that both sampling effort and environmental conditions varied significantly among years. In all candidate structures,  $p$  was fixed to 0 for the years 1996 and 1998-2010. This was necessary because  $p$  represents the probability of live-recapturing a previously-marked bear, and no live-capture sampling occurred in these years.

We hypothesized that timing of sea-ice break-up over the continental shelf may influence the distribution of polar bears, and thus  $p$ , in fall. We evaluated the standardized spring sea-ice transition (50% threshold) date in some structures (*spring ice*, Table 5.2). Exploratory analyses suggested that proximity to the coastline also may explain variability in  $p$ . Specifically, contingency tables suggested that bears initially captured inland were more likely to be recaptured inland; and conversely that bears initially captured near the coast were more likely to be recaptured in coastal regions. We created a binary geographic covariate based on an individual's first capture location, using a threshold of 2 km from a smoothed coastline (*coastline*; i.e., the coastline excluding deep fjords, see Chapter 3). We considered two temporal structures for this covariate: 1) given the apparent differences in sampling between the 1990s and 2010s, we estimated separate effects by epoch; and 2) we included the covariate effect only for the 2010s, as exploratory analyses suggested this epoch showed the strongest relationship between  $p$  and the covariate. A small number of bears ( $n = 33$ ) initially captured in the first

sampling period that could be alive by 2011 (<35 years of age and not harvested) were not genotyped due to inadequate tissue samples or an absence of samples. Because all sampling was conducted via remote biopsy darting and subsequent genetic analysis during 2011 – 2013, these individuals had zero probability of live recapture in this period, so we assigned these bears to unique attribute groups to fix  $p = 0$  during the last 3 years of the study. As part of a study evaluating spatial ecology and population delineation (Ferguson et al. 1997, Taylor et al. 2001), a sample of adult female bears was outfitted with satellite collars in BB during 1992 – 1997. Some of these bears ( $n = 14$ ) were captured or radio-located on Baffin and Bylot islands during fall, 1993 – 1997. Because Taylor et al. (2005) state that the locations of collared bears were known at various times of the year and this information was used to assist in recaptures during 1994, 1995, and 1997, we constructed three binary radio covariates (rad94, rad95, rad97) to identify when individual females were likely wearing functional radiocollars and therefore may have been more vulnerable to capture. Not all collared bears were recaptured, however, so we did not fix  $p = 1$  for these individuals, but instead used the covariates to allow for a potentially higher recapture probability if such an effect were supported by the data. We coded dependent offspring such that radio covariates matched their mothers.

Although earlier studies (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, 2008) have assumed that all research-marked bears were reported in the harvest, current genetic analyses identified some marked bears that were harvested but not reported as marked, possibly due to marker loss (Government of Nunavut, unpublished data; Chapter 8). Hence, reporting probabilities ( $r$ ) may be biased low, especially for bears that survived many years after initial marking during which their plastic ear tags could be lost and their lip tattoos could fade. Given restrictions on the harvest of females with dependent offspring and sex-restrictive quotas, we hypothesized that  $r$  would be lower for

cubs, yearlings, and 2+ females; however, we did not fix  $r = 0$  for cubs because at least 1 cub was harvested. We also hypothesized that improvements in the Greenlandic reporting system during the mid-2000s might yield increased reporting rates, so we considered models where  $r$  differed by early vs. later years (1993 – 2005 vs. 2006 – 2013). Since few cubs or yearlings were harvested, we incorporated this temporal structure as an additive effect for age 2+ individuals only.

We considered three candidate structures for site fidelity ( $F$ ). Previous studies (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005) assumed perfect overlap of the areas sampled by live recapture and dead recovery sampling, with no permanent emigration from the study population. To reflect this assumption we evaluated a sub-model in which  $F$  was fixed to 1 for all sex and age-classes ( $F=1$ ), without assessing a parameter penalty for QAIC<sub>c</sub>. Using this approach, any permanent emigration that actually occurs for the BB subpopulation would be reflected in lower estimates of survival. Given that the subpopulation boundaries are only partially discrete, interchange is known to occur among subpopulations, and some harvest recoveries occurred outside the BB population boundaries (Figure 5.7), we also hypothesized that bears may permanently emigrate from the BB sampling area. We therefore evaluated a structure in which  $F$  was estimated as a constant across all age-sex classes ( $F.$ ). Using this approach, survival estimates would not be biased by permanent emigration, but simulations indicated that under high levels of temporary emigration, rates of permanent emigration would be overestimated (i.e., temporary emigration would be misidentified as permanent emigration due to small sample sizes and short live-recapture sampling epochs relative to the life span of polar bears). We also hypothesized that adult males would exhibit lower site fidelity, so we considered a model structure in which

independent males (age 2+) had a different fidelity rate than females and their dependent offspring ( $F_{family}$ ).

Overdispersion, or extra-binomial variation, exists in mark-recapture data when the capture histories of individual animals are not independent (e.g., as is the case for family groups, in which the fate of the cubs depends on the adult female, or when emigration is non-random). Correcting for overdispersion is necessary to avoid underestimating the variance of parameters. To estimate overdispersion, we constructed our most highly parameterized model and used the median  $\hat{c}$  approach as implemented in Program MARK (Cooch and White 2015). This method employs simulations to generate an estimate of  $c$ , the over-dispersion parameter. Results suggested that the BB data were modestly over-dispersed (i.e.,  $\hat{c} = 1.1$ ), as would be expected given the dependency between females and their cubs (Taylor et al. 2005), so we inflated  $\hat{c}$  and based model selection and inference on QAIC<sub>c</sub> (Burnham 1998).

Given 10 sub-model structures for  $S$ , 12 for  $p$ , 1 for  $r$ , and 3 for  $F$ , there would be 360 potential model structures if all possible combinations of the sub-model structures were considered. We used a modified version of the plausible combinations approach outlined in Bromaghin et al. (2013) to identify supported sub-model structures. This process entailed holding constant the most generalized structure (excluding individual covariates) for three of the four sub-models while evaluating structures for the fourth sub-model. We considered sub-model structures with  $\Delta\text{QAIC}_c < 4$  as representing plausible structures and constructed all possible combinations from these sub-model structures. We note that  $S$  was poorly estimated for coy (i.e., at implausibly high rates near 1, but not inestimable), a finding which we attributed to the scarcity of data for coy, particularly during the 2010s sampling period in which many coy were not marked. Hence, we estimated a pooled  $S$  rate for coy and yrlg in all subsequent models.

Because coy were approximately 9 months old at the time of marking, it is biologically plausible that their survival rates were similar to those of yearlings.

We computed model-averaged estimates (Burnham and Anderson 2002) of parameters ( $S$ ,  $r$  and  $F$ ) using a threshold of  $\Delta\text{QAIC}_c < 4$ . Because our estimates of survival reflected harvest mortality, we derived unharvested survival ( $S^*$ ; also referred to as “natural” survival) using the equation as  $S^* = S + r \times (1 - S)$  (e.g, Taylor et al. 2005, 2008, Peacock et al. 2013) and estimated the variance of  $S^*$  using the delta method (following Taylor et al. 2008). This derivation of unharvested survival is based on several assumptions. First, it assumes harvest of all marked bears is reported; under-reporting of the harvest, which has been documented (Government of Nunavut, unpublished data; Chapter 8), leads to negative bias in estimates of  $S^*$ . This derivation also assumes that harvest mortality is completely additive. In other words, that no harvested bears would otherwise die during a given interval, and that the higher population density for an unharvested subpopulation would not lead to lower vital rates for all bears in future years. A violation of the assumption of additive mortality would result in positive bias in estimates of  $S^*$ . A more appropriate equation for unharvested survival would be:  $S^* = S/[1 - r \times (1 - S)]$ , which assumes that harvested bears are subject to the same natural mortality rate as other bears. In this equation, the quantity in brackets represents the probability of surviving the hunting season and  $S$  represents the product of natural and hunting mortality (Anderson and Burnham 1976). We used the Taylor et al. (2005) derivation for unharvested survival to maintain consistency with earlier studies, noting that the resulting potential for bias is small given high unharvested survival rates and relatively low harvest mortality for polar bears.

For highly supported models, we obtained annual estimates of abundance for groups of individuals that share common estimates of  $p$  (e.g., certain age and sex-classes), using a

generalized Horvitz-Thompson estimator for the yrl and age 2+ classes, in which  $\hat{N}_{i,t} = \frac{n_{i,t}}{\hat{p}_{i,t}}$ , where  $n_{i,t}$  is the number of bears captured in group  $i$  during year  $t$ , and  $\hat{p}_{i,t}$  is the recapture probability for group  $i$  during year  $t$ . However, estimates of  $n$  and  $p$  did not accurately represent coy because we did not sample all coy during the 2011 – 2013 sampling period. Thus, we estimated coy abundance as the product of age 2+ females with coy litters (estimated via a Horvitz-Thompson estimator) and mean observed coy litter size. We summed estimates of abundance across groups to obtain total estimates of abundance (derived for each model) by year. Similar to earlier studies (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, Peacock et al. 2013), we used the delta method (Seber 1982, Powell 2007) to estimate variances for annual abundance estimates [R (R Core Team 2015) package emdbook (Bolker 2016)]. Variance estimates incorporated parameter variances and covariances (as computed in Program MARK) as well as variances of mean coy litter sizes. We used model weights to model-average estimates of total abundance by year and their associated variances. We also calculated mean estimates of total abundance by sampling epoch and estimated variance using the delta method. Given the 13-year interval without live captures preceding 2011, estimates of abundance for 2011 were based on values of  $p$  estimated for the relatively small number of bears that were marked during the 1990s and survived until 2011. These estimates of  $p$  were characterized by high uncertainty and potential small-sample bias. Their use in the denominator of the Horvitz-Thompson estimator, in conjunction with the large sample of first-time captures in the numerator of the estimator, had the potential to produce spurious results. Therefore, we excluded the less-reliable estimate of abundance from 2011 when calculating mean total abundance for the 2010s sampling epoch.



### Geographic subsetting to evaluate the effects of different sampling methods in the 1990s and 2010s

Because sampling during the 1990s was spatially restricted to a portion of the BB subpopulation's fall range and did not include bears located farther inland, particularly within deep fjords, or on the sea ice. In contrast, from 2011-2013 onshore sampling was more comprehensive and systematic. To explore the potential impact of differences in sampling on estimates of subpopulation size, we delineated the extent of the sampling area in the 1990s based on capture locations (see Chapter 3). We then created a subset of the 2010s live-capture data that only included captures that occurred within the more restricted sampling area of the 1990s, recompiled the individual capture histories, and repeated our mark-recapture analyses using the same procedures as outlined above. We expected that comparison of abundance estimates for the 2010s using full dataset (i.e., for the complete sampling area) vs. the restricted dataset (i.e., for the restricted sampling area), would help inform the potential bias in estimates of abundance from the 1990s based on an incomplete sampling frame. Conceptually, this assumed that

$\hat{N}_{2010s}^{subset\ data} / \hat{N}_{2010s}^{full\ data} \approx \hat{N}_{1990s}^{subset\ data} / \hat{N}_{1990s}^{full\ data}$ ; where  $\hat{N}$  represents estimates of abundance, and  $\hat{N}_{1990s}^{full\ data}$  represents the (unknown) estimate of abundance that would have been obtained in the 1990s if the complete sampling area had been covered. This assumption seemed plausible given that satellite telemetry data indicated that onshore habitat use of polar bears did not vary between the 1990s and 2010s. Although this investigation provides information on the effects of difference in onshore sampling between the two epochs, it did not provide any information on potential bias in the 1990s abundance estimate due to bears using offshore sea ice in the 1990s.

### **5.3. Results**

The BB mark-recapture dataset consisted of 2,324 total captures of 1,992 individuals (i.e., there were 332 live recaptures), and 234 dead recoveries during the 1993 – 2013 study period (Table 5.3). Data were relatively sparse for live captures of age 2+ females during the 1990s, and dead recoveries of all bears during the early- to mid-2000s. During September 2012 and 2013, we sighted 30 polar bears (including 21 independent bears) in Greenland (*cf.* 1,043 total captures during 2012 and 2013; Table 5.3), suggesting a relatively low number of bears resided in Greenland during the late summer in those years (see Chapter 3).

Females comprised a greater proportion of live captures of age 2+ bears in the 2010s compared to the 1990s (mean annual proportion female during the 1990s: 0.42; 2010s: 0.54; Table 5.3). We hypothesize that under-representation of age 2+ females was a result of the greater use of inland habitats by denning females and lack of sampling in those habitats during the 1990s. Age 2+ males comprised nearly 70% of the reported harvest of marked bears over the 21-year study period (162 of 234; Table 5.3), with adult females exhibiting sparse recovery data, especially during the interim epoch (1998-2010) with no live encounter data.

The plausible combinations approach indicated that the following sub-model structures were supported by the data: one  $S$  structure (3 temporal epochs with an interactive effect with sex for the 2+ age class; Table 5.4); two  $p$  structures [including (1) fully time-varying  $p$  and (2) spring sea-ice transition date to explain variability in  $p$ ; Table 5.5]; all three  $F$  structures (Table 5.6); and one  $r$  structure as candidate structures from which to construct the final set of models. Although within 4  $\Delta\text{QAIC}_c$  of the most highly supported  $p$  structures, we excluded  $p$  sub-models that incorporated the inland proximity to coastline covariate, as this was an uninformative parameter that was not supported by lower  $\text{QAIC}_c$  relative to hierarchically simpler models (Burnham and Anderson 1992, Arnold 2010, Peacock et al. 2012).

We constructed the final candidate model set using all combinations of the well-supported sub-model structures as identified above. The most-supported model included a fully time-varying  $p$  structure and estimated  $F$  as constant across all sex and age classes. Three additional model structures were within  $\Delta 4$  QAIC<sub>c</sub> of the most-supported model, including a model with  $F$  estimated separately for independent males, and a model with  $F$  fixed to 1 (Table 5.7).

The time-constant, model-averaged estimate of survival for dependent bears was ( $S = 0.87$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ; Table 5.8). Estimates of  $S$  for age 2+ females (1993 – 1997: 0.84,  $SE = 0.04$ ; 1998 – 2010: 0.95,  $SE = 0.02$ ; 2011 – 2013: 0.90,  $SE = 0.05$ ) and males (1993 – 1997: 0.89,  $SE = 0.02$ ; 1998 – 2010: 0.87,  $SE = 0.02$ ; 2011 – 2013: 0.78,  $SE = 0.06$ ) varied among epochs, although statistical uncertainty and potential bias made it difficult to evaluate whether this variation was meaningful (see Discussion). Reporting rates were nearly 2-fold higher for age 2+ males than 2+ females, reflecting male-biased harvest, but there was not a strong difference in estimates of  $r$  before and after 1995. Estimated natural survival for age 2+ males (0.83,  $SE = 0.06$ ) was less than age 2+ females (0.91, 0.05) during 2011 – 2013 (coy: 0.88,  $SE = 0.06$ ; yrl: 0.89,  $SE = 0.06$ ). Bears exhibited strong fidelity to the study area ( $F = 0.96$  for females and dependent young, and  $F = 0.97$  for age 2+ males). This suggests that approximately 3 – 4% of the study population permanently emigrated from the sampling area each year, although we did not utilize Barker models that additionally measure the probability that some of these bears might have returned.

Mean estimates of total abundance for the BB subpopulation were 2,173 (95% CI = 1,252 – 3,093) for the 1994 – 1997 sampling epoch and 2,826 (95% CI = 2,059 – 3,593) for the years 2012 – 2013 (Table 5.9), although these estimates correspond to different sampling frames in the

1990s and 2010s. The mean estimate of abundance for the years 2012-2013 was approximately 10% lower for the geographic subset dataset ( $2,553 \pm 433$ ) compared to the full dataset ( $2,826 \pm 391$ ). In addition, the annual point estimates for 2012 – 2013 derived from the geographic subset were lower than estimates based on the full data (Table 5.12). These findings suggest that the restricted sampling frame introduced negative bias into estimates of abundance for the 1990s. The difference in the spatial distribution of captures between the 1990s and 2010s was consistent with our conclusion that the sampling frames differed substantially between epochs, particularly with respect to the inland distribution of bears in central and northern Baffin Island (Figures 5.1, 5.8, and 5.9). Very few bears were recorded beyond the mouths of fjords in these regions during the 1990s, whereas observations were numerous there during the 2011 – 2013 epoch. This finding was reinforced by telemetry data during the 2000s that indicated no large-scale shift in onshore distribution (relative to the coastline) between epochs (see also Chapters 3 and 4).

The geographic subset included 1,679 total individuals, as >300 bears from the 2000s were censored from this analysis based on their locations outside the estimated sampling frame of the 1990s. Model selection results were generally similar to the comprehensive data set, although the coastline covariate (for modeling  $p$ ) was more highly supported in some structures (Table 5.10). Parameter estimates also were consistent with the comprehensive data set (Table 5.11).

#### **5.4. Discussion**

We used physical mark-recapture data collected 1993-1995 and 1997, genetic mark-recapture data collected 2011-2013, and dead recovery data from the 21-year period 1993-2013 to estimate demographic parameters for the BB subpopulation. Our mean estimate of total

abundance for the years 2012-2013 was 2,826 (95% CI = 2,059 – 3,593). Our estimate of mean abundance for the period 1994-1997 (2,173; 95% CI = 1,252 – 3,093) was consistent with the previous estimate from Taylor et al. (2005) (2,074; SE = 266), despite minor differences in the data and analytical methods. Although our 2012-2013 estimate of abundance is ~30% higher than our 1990s estimate, differences in sampling protocols and changes in environmental conditions between epochs make interpretation about true changes in population size difficult. Notably, the distribution of capture locations was different between epochs, with a higher proportion of captures in inland areas and deep within fjords during the 2010s (Figures 5.3, 5.8 and 5.9, see also Chapter 3 Figure 3.1). We used satellite telemetry data to compare on-land distribution and summer habitat use between the two epochs. These analyses provided no evidence for changes in on-land distribution in the summer, suggesting that differences in the spatial distribution of captures resulted from a more restricted sampling frame in the 1990s. In the 1990s only one helicopter was used for sampling in western Baffin Bay in fall whereas the 2000-sampling involved the use of two helicopters operating at the same time. In addition, satellite telemetry data suggested that an unknown but potentially large number of bears were not present in the 1990s study area due to the presence of summer pack ice offshore from Baffin Island, whereas offshore ice was largely unavailable in the 2010s.

We investigated potential bias resulting from differences in sampling protocols between epochs. Although flight paths for the helicopters used to capture bears in the 1990s were unavailable, we estimated the spatial extent of the sampling area using capture locations, and then created a geographical subset of the 2010s data based on this restricted sampling frame. These results indicated that a lack of inland sampling in the 2010s would have resulted in approximately 10% negative bias in the mean estimate of total abundance for 2012-2013, which

suggests that similar bias likely existed in the mean estimate of total abundance for the 1990s, due to restricted geographic sampling. The source of this bias is individual heterogeneity in  $p$  due to polar bear movements with respect to the sampling area (i.e., temporary emigration; Schaub et al. 2004); which in the extreme can result in some bears effectively having  $p = 0$ , and therefore being completely excluded (i.e., “missed”) from the study. The presence of offshore sea ice during the 1990s was another potential source of negative bias, and an issue that we were unable to resolve. These environmental conditions are problematic because bears using the sea ice were either temporarily or permanently absent from the mark-recapture sampling area during the 1990s. Although sample sizes of independent collared females were small, telemetry data suggested that  $>75\%$  of collared bears were outside of the sampled area or on remnant sea ice during the fall sampling period in some years during 1990s. As such, an unknown but potentially large proportion of the population was unavailable for capture in some years. By contrast, in the 2010s sea ice was not present in Baffin Bay in late summer and bears were more concentrated in the onshore sampling areas (i.e., on Baffin or Bylot islands, or West Greenland); 68-85% of collared bears were inside the sampling areas in all years (2011-2013). If the probability of being a temporary emigrant in the 1990s was sufficiently high, relative to the short duration of the study and small sample sizes; or if there was Markovian dependence in the probability of being a temporary emigrant (e.g., if a bear that was on remnant sea ice in year  $t$  tended to return to the ice in year  $t + 1$ ), then abundance estimates from the 1990s may be subject to additional bias. The sign of this bias was likely negative (i.e., it is possible that a meaningful proportion of the subpopulation was effectively excluded from abundance estimates), although the component of bias due to potential Markovian dependence could be either positive or negative depending on the directionality of Markovian dependence (Schaub et al. 2004). Our

assessment of temporary emigration in the 1990s is consistent with traditional ecological knowledge in the Baffin Bay region, which suggests that some bears spend the entire year on sea ice and do not come ashore (S. Atkinson, pers. obs.). The effects of temporary emigration on 1990s abundance estimates are difficult to quantify because of the short live-recapture sampling window (1993 – 1995; 1997) and low recapture probabilities.

Given the multiple potential sources of negative bias in the 1990s abundance estimate, and statistical uncertainty in estimated parameters, we cannot conclude that the size of the BB subpopulation increased between the 1990s and 2010s. The 2010s estimate of abundance constitutes the best-available information and is suitable for informing management, but we cannot reliably determine the trend in subpopulation size between the 1990s and 2010s.

It should, however, be mentioned that during TEK-studies in both Nunavut (Dowsley 2005, Dowsley and Taylor 2006) and West Greenland (Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990, Born et al. 2011) several interviewees noted an increased occurrence of BB-polar bears in coastal areas since sometime in the 1990s. Some interviewees were of the opinion that this reflected an increase in subpopulation (BB) size whereas others thought that it reflected a change in to the bears' behavior, and the fact that they occur closer to land as a reaction to the reduction in the sea-ice cover (cf. Born et al. 2011:206-207 for a discussion of this). Born et al. (2011) concluded that it was not possible from their interview survey to determine the extent to which an increased occurrence of polar bears in the hunting areas represents an increase in the population or a change in distribution (or for that sake a combination of these factors). Chapter 4 documents changes in the on-ice behavior of BB bears, with bears located closer to the coastline (and closer to shallow depths) in all seasons.

The sampling issues outlined above also have the potential to affect estimates of survival probability (Peñaloza et al. 2014), although these issues are mitigated to some extent by the inclusion of dead recovery data (Peacock et al. 2012). Our estimates of survival for age 2+ females 1993 – 1997 are notably lower than estimates of similar age classes obtained by Taylor et al. (2005) and Peacock et al. (2012), but our estimates of coy and yearling survival are higher. Factors that may contribute to these differences include: different treatment of data (e.g., exclusion of spring captures, recognition of coarser age classes in the present study relative to Taylor et al. 2005 and Peacock et al. 2012); our exclusion of data collected during the 1970s and 1980s, which were included in Taylor et al. (2005) as initial captures but not fully modeled as individual capture histories; and the inclusion of additional information (e.g., harvest recoveries during the 2000s and live captures during the 2010s), given that some parameters were estimated using information that was shared across sampling epochs.

The mean estimate of total annual survival of age 2+ males was particularly low (0.78, SE = 0.06) during 2011 – 2013, compared to values from earlier periods in this study and values reported for other polar bear subpopulations (PBSG 2010), with the exception of the Southern Hudson Bay subpopulation for which low estimates of adult male survival were reported for the final years of the study (Obbard et al. 2007). Although  $r$  for 2+ males was higher than 2+ females due to the sex-selective harvest, estimates of unharvested male survival 2011-2013 ( $S^* = 0.83$ ) were also significantly lower than estimates of  $S^*$  for females during this period ( $S^* = 0.91$ ). Low survival of adult males in the 2010s may be a biological signal that reflects a disproportionate impact of environmental change on males, either through lower true survival or increased dispersal of young males to adjacent subpopulations due to density-dependent effects. However, interpretation of point estimates and potential trends in  $S$  is difficult due to the short



time-frame (i.e., only 3 years) of live recaptures in the 2010s and confounding of parameters and potential bias in estimates of survival during terminal years (e.g., Peñaloza et al. 2014). We suggest that, when viewed together with information on habitat loss (Chapter 4) and nutritional condition (Chapter 7) for BB polar bears, the low estimates of  $S$  for 2+ males 2011-2013 may signal negative density-dependent population effects. However, we emphasize that additional years of live-recapture and dead-recovery data would be necessary to determine the degree to which low estimates of survival were influenced by temporary emigration and other factors.

Adjusting total survival with  $r$  to derive unharvested survival yielded estimates of female survival in the 2010s that appear too low to support stable or positive population growth in the absence of harvest. Regehr et al. (2015) suggest that a minimum unharvested adult female survival rate of  $\sim 0.93$ , referenced to a population density at maximum net productivity level, is necessary for long-term persistence. We note, however, that our estimates of dependent young survival were high (*cf.* Taylor et al. 2005), although these estimates applied to the entire 1993-2013 study period. Based on the life history of polar bears, survival of dependent young would be expected to decline (e.g., in response to negative environmental conditions) before the survival of adult females declined (e.g., Eberhardt 2002). In addition, due to the lack of precise numeric age information available from non-invasive genetic sampling in the 2010s, we estimated survival for a single age class of polar bears age  $\geq 2$  years. Under this approach subadult and senescent bears, which likely have lower survival rates (e.g., Regehr et al. 2007), were included with prime age adults. This likely had the effect of reducing the overall estimate of female survival. We also note that the lowest estimates of total and unharvested survival for age 2+ females occurred during 1994-1997, a period during which sea-ice habitats were more available compared to the 2010s. These considerations, in conjunction with the high and variable

levels of temporary emigration from the sampling area in the 1990s, and our approach of aligning temporal epochs in the survival sub-model with changes in sampling design, could have led to negative bias in estimates of female survival.

We recommend further caution in interpretation of survival estimates. First, the three temporal epochs for which we estimated survival were based on – and are confounded with – sampling methodologies (i.e., whether estimates were derived from both live recapture and dead recovery data, or dead recovery data alone). In addition, the 2011 – 2013 epoch represents the minimum length of a time series from which it is possible to estimate survival using Cormack-Jolly-Seber models, such that a single anomalous year (from either a sampling or biological perspective) has a greater impact on the pooled estimate. Additionally, negative terminal bias in survival estimates is a well-known challenge with mark-recapture studies, especially under scenarios with pronounced temporary emigration (Peñaloza et al. 2014).

To provide additional insight into our findings, we conducted complementary modeling using Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods in Program MARK. We re-fit several well-supported models and incorporated annual random effects for  $S$ ,  $r$ , and in some cases  $p$ . Annual random effects can offer advantages over fixed effect approaches by representing temporal patterns in the data via a long-term mean and annual shrinkage estimates, such that annual estimates of a parameter only deviate from the mean to the extent that any difference is supported by the data (Link and Barker 2004, White et al. 2009). MCMC methods also enable delineation of sampling from process variation. However, the ability to obtain useful annual estimates from the Baffin Bay data was somewhat limited by small sample sizes and the unusual survey design (i.e., the short time series of live-encounters at the beginning and end of the study, separated by a longer period of dead-recovery only data in the middle of the study).

MCMC analyses suggested that the low estimates of mean survival for 2+ females during 1993 – 1997 and for 2+ males during 2011 – 2013 were due in part to relatively higher levels of human-caused mortality (i.e., as represented by estimates of  $r$ ) for females and males in 1996 (also the year in which no live capture sampling occurred) and 2011, respectively. Importantly, these analyses also indicated that the low estimate of survival for 2+ males during 2011 – 2013 was strongly influenced by the cohort of newly-marked bears in 2011. The long period of time without live recapture sampling (1998 – 2010) meant that bears initially marked in the 1990s (i.e., older bears) were pooled with new captures during 2011 (including younger bears) for estimation of parameters. MCMC analyses suggest that 2011 was a particularly poor year for survival of age 2+ males, but this impact was only evident among newly marked bears and not among surviving bears first marked in the 1990s. This finding suggests possible individual or finer-scale age-based variation in survival, but sample sizes and study design (i.e., the 13-year interval with no live captures) were insufficient to fit models with individual random effects using either maximum likelihood or MCMC methods. In sum, MCMC analyses supported our interpretation that the BB data do not provide strong evidence for temporal changes in survival, with the exception of the two years noted above. We recommend that future work in Baffin Bay and elsewhere further explore models with annual random effects. In addition, incorporation of dead recovery data after 2013 will assist in estimating survival during the 2011-2013 sampling period (Peacock et al. 2012).

Based on supplementary analyses, conducted as part of this investigation, that suggest a relatively strong ability to distinguish subadults from adults using field assessments and genetic information (i.e., sex) obtained from biopsy darting (Appendix B), future modeling of data from genetic mark-recapture studies could consider a more detailed age structure. Recent advances in

analytical methods (e.g., mark-recapture models with state uncertainty; Pradel 2009) could be used to model the relatively low occurrence of errors in estimation of field ages. Given the broader base of evidence that the BB subpopulation is responding to losses of sea-ice habitat (e.g., Rode et al. 2011, Peacock et al. 2012; Chapters 4, 6, 7), considering a more detailed age structure could help to assess whether survival rates for adults and subadults exhibited different temporal trends (e.g., per the expectation that subadult survival rates are among the first demographic parameters to respond to environmental changes; Regehr et al. 2007, Stirling and Derocher 2012).

To further assess bias and precision of estimated model parameters, we completed simulations in which Barker models, which are capable of explicitly modeling temporary emigration, were fitted to datasets that closely resembled the BB data, but included known levels and types of temporary emigration. Under moderate to high random temporary emigration ( $F=F'=0.3$  or  $0.5$ ), survival estimates were unbiased when estimated using Barker models, but moderately negatively biased when based on Burnham models (especially for females, which had lower recovery rates). CJS and Seber models both produced highly biased estimates of  $S$  when temporary emigration occurred. Markovian emigration may yield negative bias in  $S$ , although sparse telemetry data did not permit assessment of Markovian patterns in temporary emigration with the actual Baffin Bay data. Although we were unable to simulate data on abundance, Barker models provided unbiased estimates of  $p$ , whereas Burnham models provided unbiased estimates of the product of  $p \times F$ . These findings suggest that Barker models would provide reasonable estimates of the number of bears located within the sampling area on any given sampling occasion, whereas Burnham models would provide better estimates of the “super-population” (i.e., the larger group of bears with a non-negligible probability of using the

sampling area, even if some of these bears were outside of the sampling area [i.e., were temporary emigrants] on any given sampling occasion). Given that the super-population corresponds more closely to the study population of interest in BB from a biological and management perspective, this supports our decision to use the Burnham model to estimate abundance.

Although there are uncertainties in the BB subpopulation related to the demographic analyses, additional sources of information, including sea-ice conditions, movement ecology, and reproductive metrics, are useful for informing current subpopulation status. These auxiliary data suggest a lengthening of the ice-free season (Chapter 4), a significant increase in the amount of time bears spend on land during the ice-free season (Chapter 4), a northward shift in their ranges (Chapter 2), decreased reproductive output (Chapter 6), and declining body condition (Rode et al. 2011; Chapter 7). These signs point to a subpopulation that could be exhibiting density-dependent effects associated with declining carrying capacity. The relatively low estimates of unharvested survival for the 2010s, especially for adult males, are consistent with this explanation, although as stated previously we cannot rule out the presence of negative bias in survival estimates.

The Baffin Bay study highlights potential challenges in interpreting long-term trends in abundance and survival. Although Taylor et al. (2005) and York et al. (2016) assert that the BB subpopulation was uniformly and comprehensively sampled during the 1990s, we documented evidence of changes in the sampling frames between epochs (i.e., incomplete spatial sampling during the 1990s, relative to the 2000s). These changes precluded an assessment of trends in abundance, and the 13-year interval between live capture sessions limited our ability to assess temporal trends in survival, and likely resulted in increased individual heterogeneity in survival

(which we could not explicitly model) as newly-marked bears in the 2010s were pooled with older individuals first marked in the 1990s. We attempted to reconcile and understand the impacts of these issues through supplemental analyses, and future work could explore the usefulness of new analytical methods (e.g., multistate models with unobservable states; spatially-explicit models [Royle et al. 2013]) to mitigate potential bias. However, recent analyses of mark-recapture data for polar bears have identified the limitations of model-based methods to account for inconsistent sampling or violated modeling assumptions (e.g., Bromaghin et al. 2015). Therefore, we underscore the critical importance of complete and consistent sampling of the study area for robust and unbiased inference regarding population status. We also recommend evaluating the current inventory schedule and using *a priori* study design analyses to evaluate whether modifications (e.g., extending the live capture sampling periods, shortening the interval between successive capture periods, incorporation of more intensive “robust design” sampling [Converse et al. 2009]) may improve the ability to detect changes in abundance and associated vital rates. Finally we recommend considering other survey methods (i.e., aerial surveys; e.g., Aars et al. 2009) for assessing polar bear subpopulations.

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**Table 5.1.** Survival sub-model structures evaluated in mark-recapture analysis of the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation data.

S sub-model	Age	Sex	Temporal	Environmental
1	2 class	Age 2+ only	Constant	None
2	2 class	Age 2+ only	3 epoch + sex	None
3	2 class	Age 2+ only	3 epoch × sex	None
4	2 class	Age 2+ only	Constant	Ice transition
5	2 class	Age 2+ only	Constant	Ice area
6	3 class	Age 2+ only	Constant	None
7	3 class	Age 2+ only	3 epoch + sex	None
8	3 class	Age 2+ only	3 epoch × sex	None
9	3 class	Age 2+ only	Constant	Ice transition
10	3 class	Age 2+ only	Constant	Ice area

**Table 5.2.** Recapture probability sub-model structures evaluated in mark-recapture analysis of the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation. All models included a Radio covariate for bears that were outfitted with a satellite collar that may have been used to locate individuals for recapture. Bears that were not genotyped were unavailable to be recaptured during the 2011 – 2013 sampling window, so  $p$  was fixed to 0 for non-genotyped bears.

p sub-model	Family	Temporal	Geographic	Ice
1	Yes	2 epoch + family	None	None
2	Yes	2 epoch + family	Coastline, 2 epoch	None
3	Yes	2 epoch + family	Coastline, 2010s	None
4	Yes	2 epoch + family	None	Spring
5	Yes	2 epoch + family	Coastline, 2 epoch	Spring
6	Yes	2 epoch + family	Coastline, 2010s	Spring
7	Yes	2 epoch × family	None	None
8	Yes	2 epoch × family	Coastline, 2 epoch	None
9	Yes	2 epoch × family	Coastline, 2010s	None
10	Yes	Annual + family	None	None
11	Yes	Annual + family	Coastline, 2 epoch	None
12	Yes	Annual + family	Coastline, 2010s	None

**Table 5.3.** Summary table of live captures and dead recoveries during the mark-recapture study of the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation in Nunavut, Canada, and Greenland, 1993 – 2013. Shaded cells indicate that data are not possible due to an absence of marking or recapture.

Year	Initial captures						Live recaptures				Dead recoveries					
	Females			Males			Females		Males		Females			Males		
	Coy	Yrl	2+	Coy	Yrl	2+	Yrl	2+	Yrl	2+	Coy	Yrl	2+	Coy	Yrl	2+
1993	14	8	53	12	8	61					0	0	1	0	0	0
1994	26	13	65	16	9	77	0	5	0	14	0	0	3	0	0	7
1995	15	11	62	19	11	85	4	11	4	23	0	2	6	1	0	8
1996												1	8		0	7
1997	22	10	60	19	13	113		20		31	0	0	6	0	1	9
1998												0	3		0	11
1999													3			9
2000													0			8
2001													2			8
2002													0			11
2003													0			7
2004													1			7
2005													2			3
2006													3			6
2007													1			2
2008													2			4
2009													2			0
2010													0			1
2011	2	23	163	1	20	148		5		5	0	0	4	0	0	20
2012	40	30	221	35	30	192	3	41	0	54	0	0	8	0	2	14
2013	28	15	121	16	15	90	4	48	5	55	0	1	8	1	0	20
<b>Totals</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>162</b>



**Table 5.4.** Survival (*S*) sub-model selection results from analysis of mark-recapture-recovery data from the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation, 1993 – 2013. Coy = cubs of the year. Yrl = yearlings. 2+ = bears aged 2 and older. Age classes separated by a comma were estimated independently; classes not separated by a comma were pooled for estimation. Epoch = periods defined by sampling method (1993 – 1997, 1998 – 2010, and 2011 – 2013). Preliminary analyses suggested that QAICc scores of structures including sea-ice metrics were critically dependent on 1996, the year in which there was no live recapture sampling, which also happened to coincide with heavy sea ice. Structures with sea-ice covariates thus were eliminated from further consideration.

<i>S</i> sub-model structure	Parameters	$\Delta\text{QAICc}$	QAICc Weights	QDeviance
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	22	0.00	0.978	3878.0
coy yrl, 2+(sex + epoch)	20	8.36	0.015	3890.4
coy yrl, 2+(sex)	18	9.83	0.007	3896.0

**Table 5.5.** Recapture probability ( $p$ ) sub-model selection results from analysis of mark-recapture-recovery data from the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation, 1993 – 2013. Family = females / dependent bears and independent males (2 age / sex classes); ice = spring transition date; epoch = sampling period (1993 – 1995, 1997; 2011 – 2013); t = full time variation; and inland = proximity of individual's first capture location to smoothed coastline (2 km threshold; binary). All  $p$  structures incorporated the radio collar covariate representing bears that were outfitted with collars that may have been used to locate them.

$p$ sub-model structure	Parameters	$\Delta\text{QAICc}$	QAICc Weights	QDeviance
family + t	22	0	0.418	3878.0
family + t + coastline (2010s)	23	1.31	0.217	3877.3
family + t + coastline (epoch)	24	1.32	0.216	3875.2
family + epoch + ice	19	3.50	0.073	3887.6
family + epoch + ice + coastline (epoch)	21	4.78	0.038	3884.8
family + epoch + ice + coastline (2010s)	20	4.78	0.038	3886.8
family + epoch	18	15.49	0.0002	3901.6
family + epoch + coastline (2010s)	19	16.96	0.0001	3901.0
family + epoch + coastline (epoch)	20	17.08	0.0001	3899.1
family $\times$ epoch	19	17.31	0.0001	3901.4
family $\times$ epoch + coastline (epoch)	21	18.66	<0.0001	3898.7
family $\times$ epoch + coastline (2010s)	20	18.71	<0.0001	3900.8

**Table 5.6.** Fidelity (*F*) sub-model selection results from analysis of mark-recapture-recovery data from the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation, 1993 – 2013. Coy = cubs of the year. Yrl = yearlings. 2+ = bears aged 2 and older. Age classes separated by a comma were estimated independently; classes not separated by a comma were pooled for estimation.

<i>F</i> sub-model structure	Parameters	$\Delta\text{QAICc}$	QAICc Weights	QDeviance
Constant	21	0.00	0.57	3878.4
coy yrl 2+ F, 2+ M	22	1.62	0.25	3878.0
Fixed = 1	20	2.28	0.18	3882.7

**Table 5.7.** Model selection results ( $< 4 \Delta\text{QAIC}_c$ ) from analysis of mark-recapture-recovery data from the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation, 1993 – 2013. Coy = cubs of the year. Yrl = yearlings. 2+ = bears aged 2 and older. Age classes separated by a comma were estimated independently; classes not separated by a comma were pooled for estimation. For  $S$ , epoch = periods defined by sampling method (1993 – 1997, 1998 – 2010, and 2011 – 2013). For  $p$ , family = females / dependent bears and independent males (2 age / sex classes); ice = spring transition date; epoch = sampling period (1993 – 1995, 1997; 2011 – 2013); and  $t$  = full time variation. For  $r$ , time = 1992 – 2005 and 2006 – 2013. All  $p$  structures incorporated the radio collar covariate representing bears that were outfitted with collars that may have been used to locate them.

Model Structures				Parameters	$\Delta\text{AIC}_c$	AICc Weights	QDeviance
$S$	$P$	$R$	$F$				
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + $t$	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	Constant	21	0	0.52	3878.4
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + $t$	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	22	1.62	0.23	3878.0
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + $t$	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	Fixed = 1	20	2.28	0.17	3882.7
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + epoch + ice	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	Constant	18	3.57	0.09	3888.1

**Table 5.8.** Model averaged ( $<\Delta 4$  QAIC<sub>c</sub>) parameter estimates obtained from mark-recapture study of polar bears in the Baffin Bay subpopulation, 1993 – 2013.

Parameter	Class	Estimate (SE)
Survival (total)		
	Cubs of the year / yearlings	0.87 (0.06)
	2+ Females, 1993 – 1997	0.84 (0.04)
	2+ Females, 1998 – 2010	0.95 (0.02)
	2+ Females, 2011 – 2013	0.90 (0.05)
	2+ Males, 1993 – 1997	0.89 (0.02)
	2+ Males, 1998 – 2010	0.87 (0.02)
	2+ Males, 2011 – 2013	0.78 (0.06)
Reporting		
	Cubs of the year	0.06 (0.05)
	Yearlings	0.13 (0.07)
	2+ Females, 1993 – 2005	0.19 (0.05)
	2+ Females, 2006 - 2013	0.16 (0.05)
	2+ Males, 1993 – 2005	0.30 (0.03)
	2+ Males, 2006 – 2013	0.26 (0.06)
Fidelity		
	Cubs of the year, yearlings, and 2+ females	0.96 (0.03)
	2+ Males	0.97 (0.02)

**Table 5.9.** Model averaged ( $<\Delta 4 \text{QAIC}_c$ ) estimates of abundance ( $\hat{N} \pm \text{SE}$ ; [95% Confidence Interval]) obtained from mark-recapture study of polar bears in the Baffin Bay subpopulation, 1994 – 1997, 2011 – 2013. The 2011 estimate is believed to be biased based on a limited sample of surviving bears from the 1990s that were available for recapture (see Methods).

1994	1995	1997	2011	2012	2013
2280 $\pm$ 615 (1073-3486)	1999 $\pm$ 359 (1295-2703)	2239 $\pm$ 393 (1469-3009)	4202 $\pm$ 1762 (749-7656)	2595 $\pm$ 352 (1905-3286)	3056 $\pm$ 426 (2221-3893)

**Table 5.10.** Model selection results ( $< 4 \Delta\text{QAIC}_c$ ) from analysis of geographic subset of mark-recapture-recovery data from the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation, 1993 – 2013. Coy = cubs of the year. Yrl = yearlings. 2+ = bears aged 2 and older. Age classes separated by a comma were estimated independently; classes not separated by a comma were pooled for estimation. For  $S$ , epoch = periods defined by sampling method (1993 – 1997, 1998 – 2010, and 2011 – 2013). For  $p$ , family = females / dependent bears and independent males (2 age / sex classes); ice = spring transition date; epoch = sampling period (1993 – 1995, 1997; 2011 – 2013); inland = proximity of initial capture to smoothed coastline; and  $t$  = full time variation. For  $r$ , time = 1992 – 2005 and 2006 – 2013. All  $p$  structures incorporated the radio collar covariate for bears that were outfitted with collars that may have been used to locate them.

Model Structures				Parameters	$\Delta\text{QAIC}_c$	QAICc Weights	QDeviance
$S$	$P$	$r$	$F$				
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + $t$	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	Constant	21	0.00	0.29	3361.5
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + epoch + ice + coastline (epoch)	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	Constant	20	0.80	0.19	3364.3
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + epoch + ice	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	Constant	18	1.09	0.17	3368.7
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + $t$	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	22	1.71	0.12	3361.2
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + $t$	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	Fixed = 1	20	2.46	0.08	3366.0
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + epoch + ice + coastline (epoch)	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	21	2.49	0.08	3364.0
coy yrl, 2+(sex $\times$ epoch)	family + epoch + ice	coy, yrl, 2+ (sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	19	2.76	0.07	3368.3

**Table 5.11.** Model averaged ( $<\Delta 4$  QAIC<sub>c</sub>) parameter estimates obtained from mark-recapture study of polar bears in the Baffin Bay subpopulation, 1993 – 2013, using the geographic data subset.

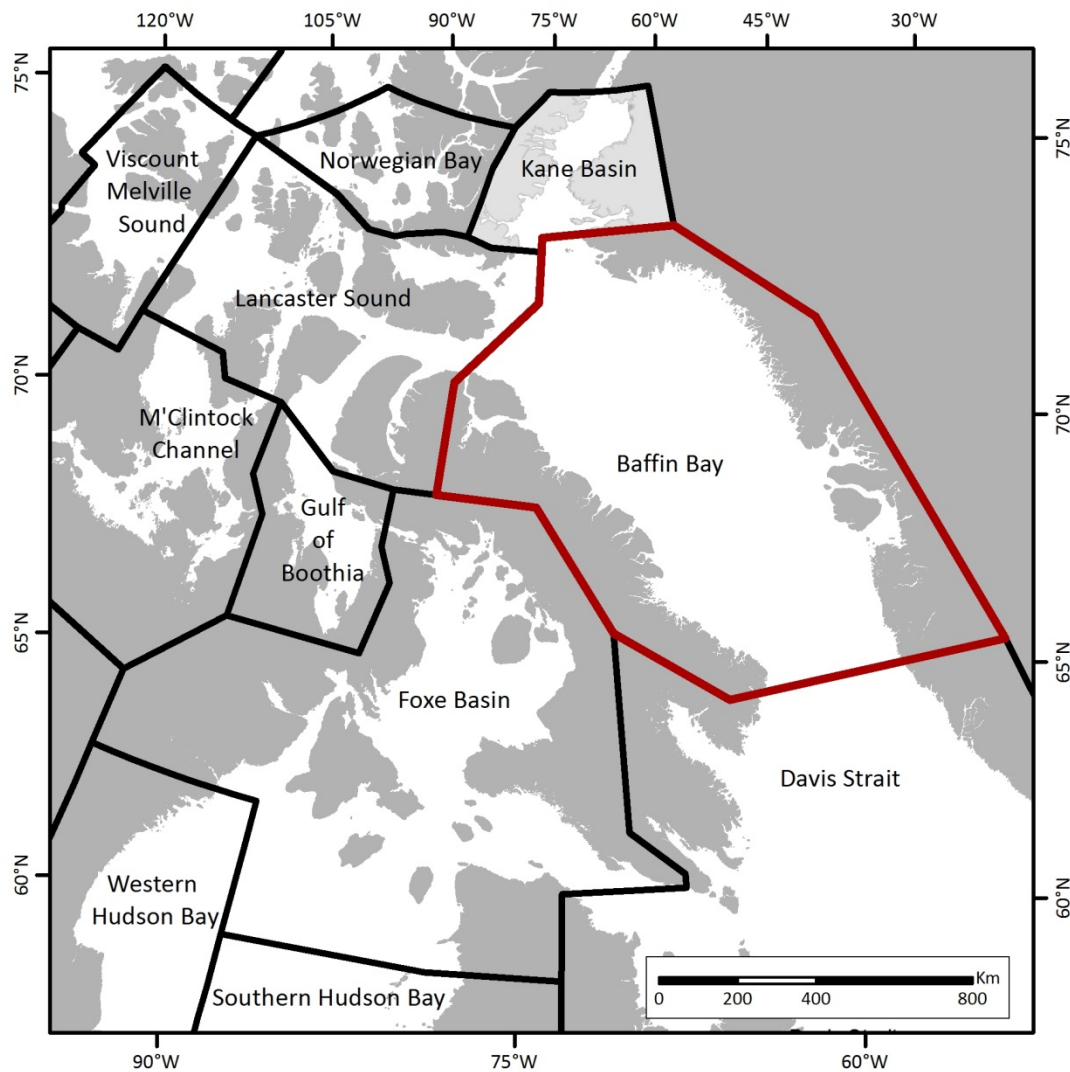
Parameter	Class	Estimate (SE)
Survival (total)		
	Cubs of the year / yearlings	0.89 (0.06)
	2+ Females, 1990s	0.85 (0.04)
	2+ Females, Gap	0.95 (0.02)
	2+ Females, 2011 – 2013	0.91 (0.05)
	2+ Males, 1990s	0.89 (0.03)
	2+ Males, Gap	0.87 (0.02)
	2+ Males, 2011 – 2013	0.78 (0.06)
Reporting		
	Cubs of the year	0.08 (0.07)
	Yearlings	0.10 (0.07)
	2+ Females, 1993 – 2005	0.19 (0.05)
	2+ Females, 2006 - 2013	0.17 (0.06)
	2+ Males, 1993 – 2005	0.29 (0.03)
	2+ Males, 2006 – 2013	0.27 (0.06)
Fidelity		
	Cubs of the year, yearlings, and 2+ females	0.95 (0.03)
	2+ Males	0.95 (0.03)



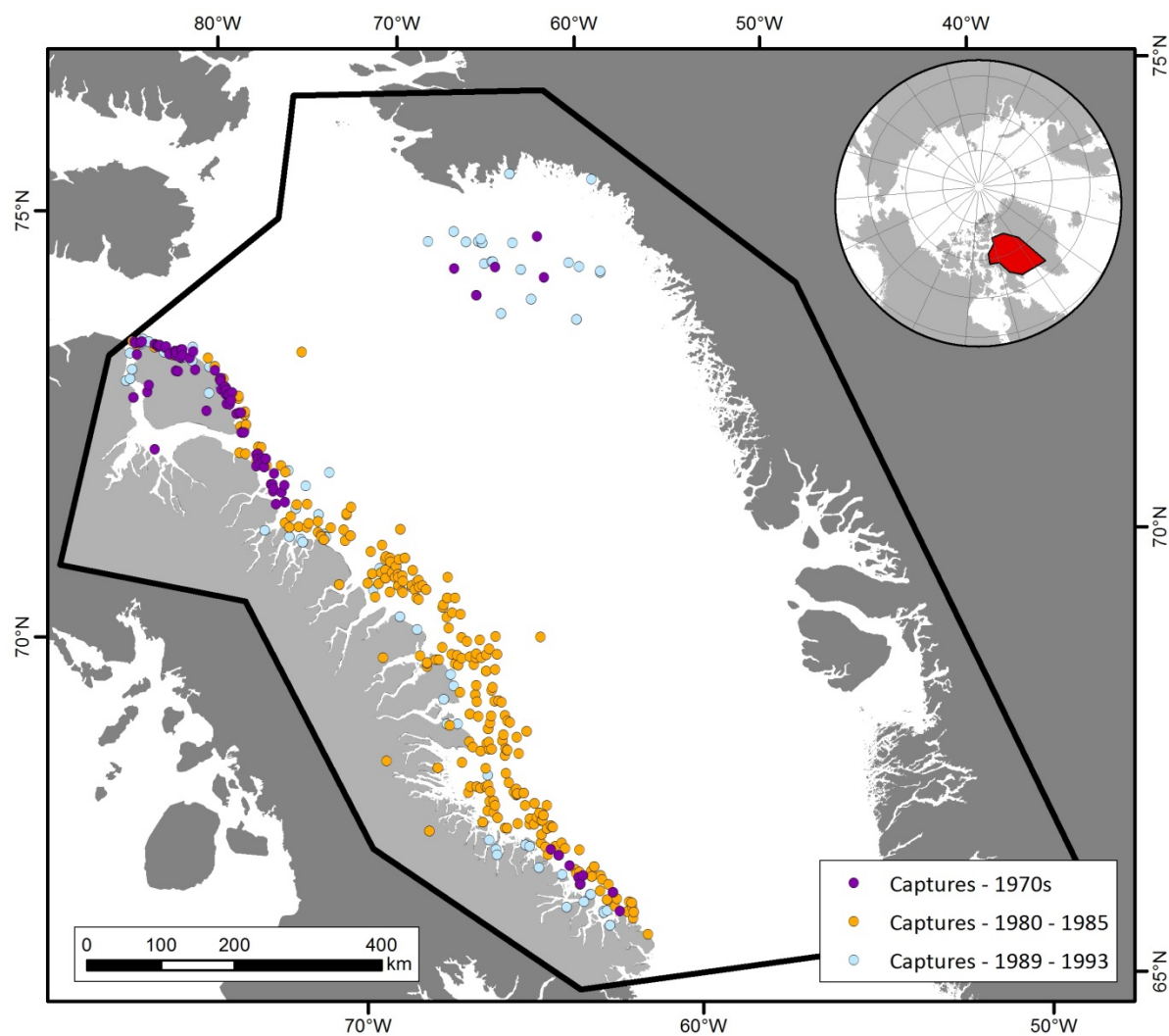
**Table 5.12.** Model averaged ( $<\Delta 4$  QAIC<sub>c</sub>) estimates of abundance ( $\hat{N} \pm \text{SE}$ ) obtained from mark-recapture study of polar bears in the Baffin Bay subpopulation, 1994 – 1997 and 2011 – 2013, using the geographic data subset.

1994	1995	1997	2011	2012	2013
2545 $\pm$ 597	2208 $\pm$ 382	2225 $\pm$ 418	2516 $\pm$ 1473	2447 $\pm$ 423	2659 $\pm$ 442

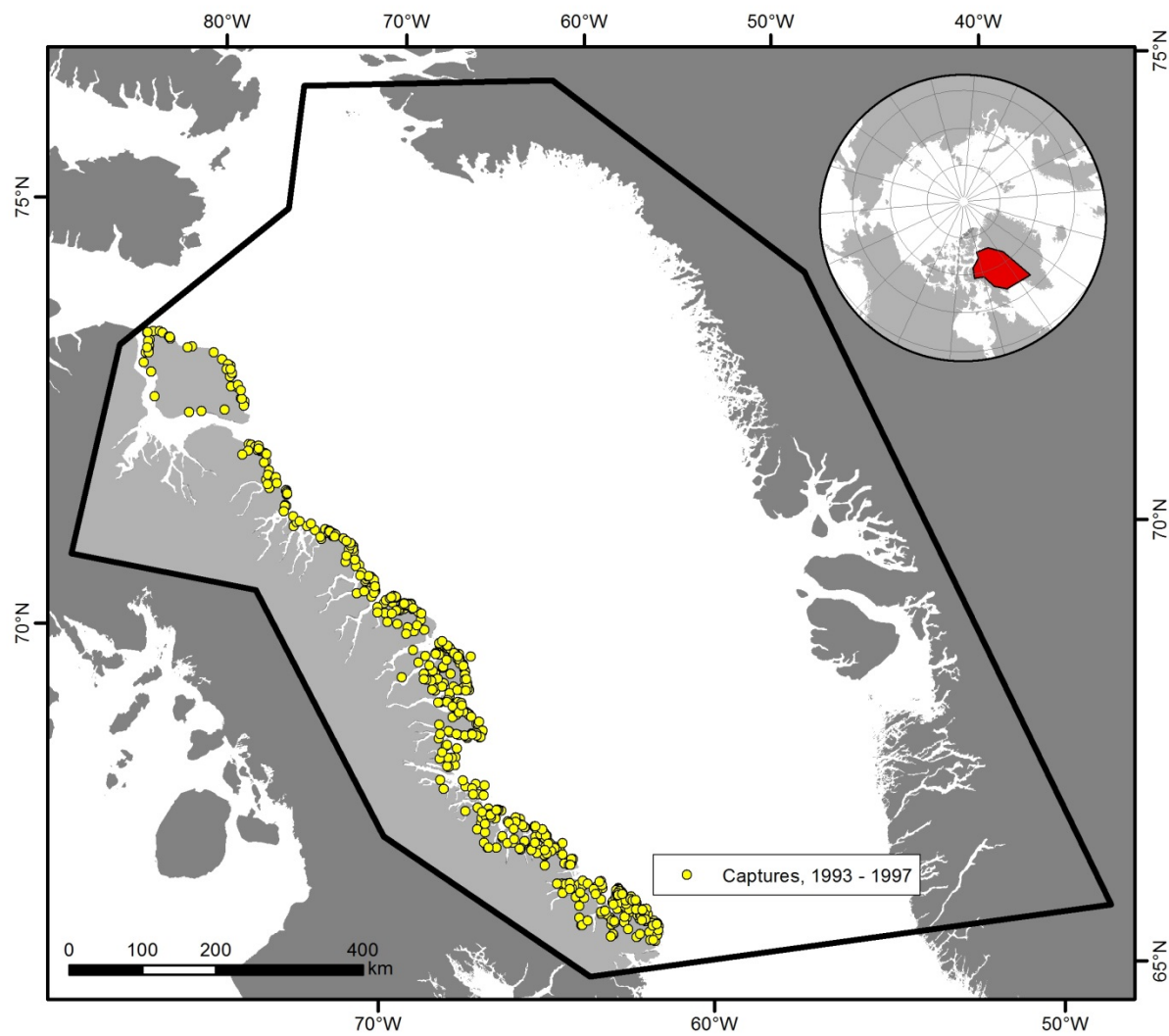
**Figure 5.1.** The BB subpopulation boundaries include portions of Nunavut, Canada, and West Greenland.



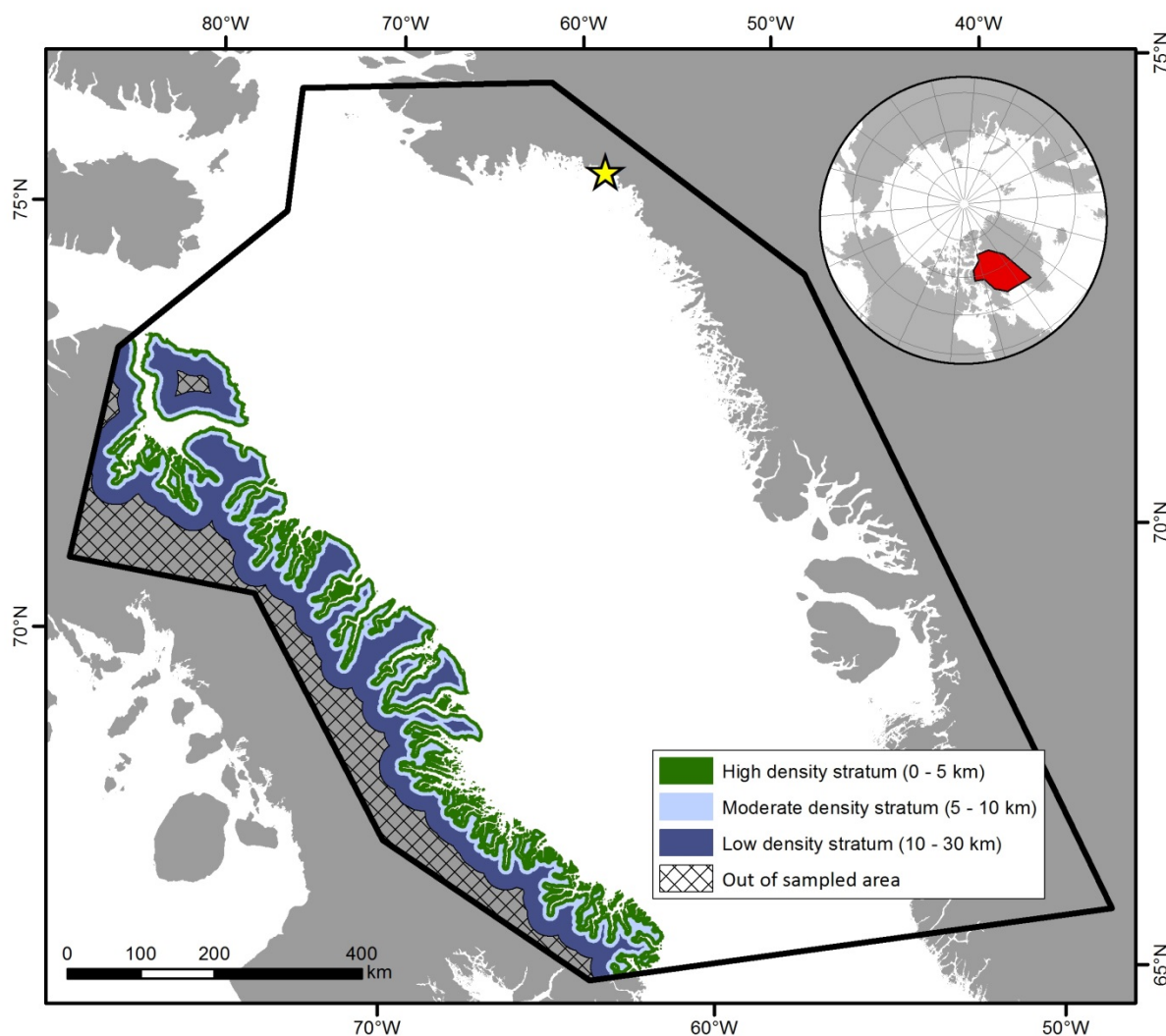
**Figure 5.2.** Locations of polar bears captured in Baffin Bay during the 1970s, 1980 - 1985, and 1989 – 1993.



**Figure 5.3.** Locations of polar bears captured in Baffin Bay during August – October, 1993 – 1995 and 1997.



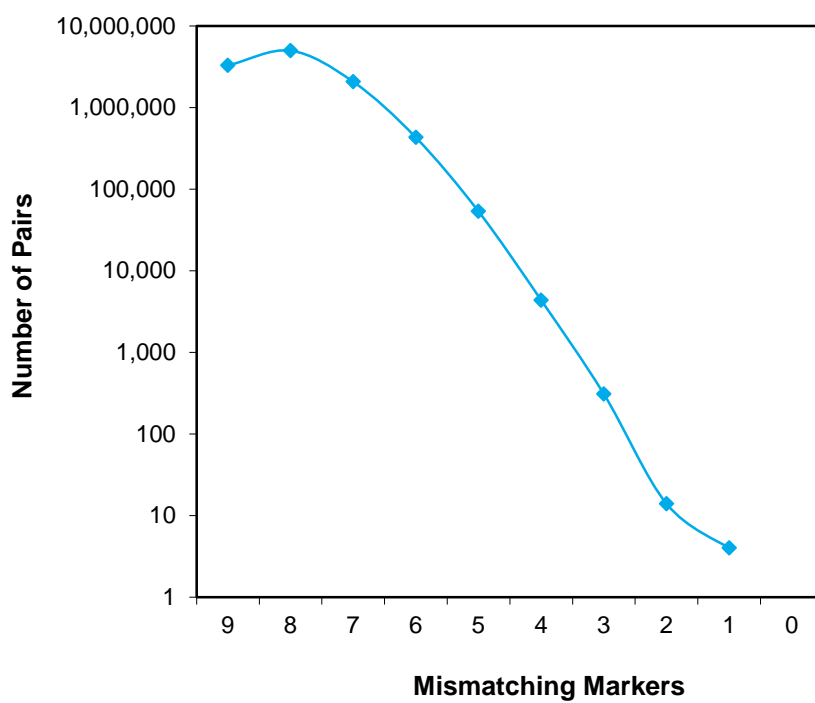
**Figure 5.4.** Sampling strata delineated on Baffin Island, Canada, for genetic mark-recapture study completed during 2011 – 2013. Fall sampling also was completed in the nearshore regions around Melville Bay, Greenland, denoted by the yellow star.



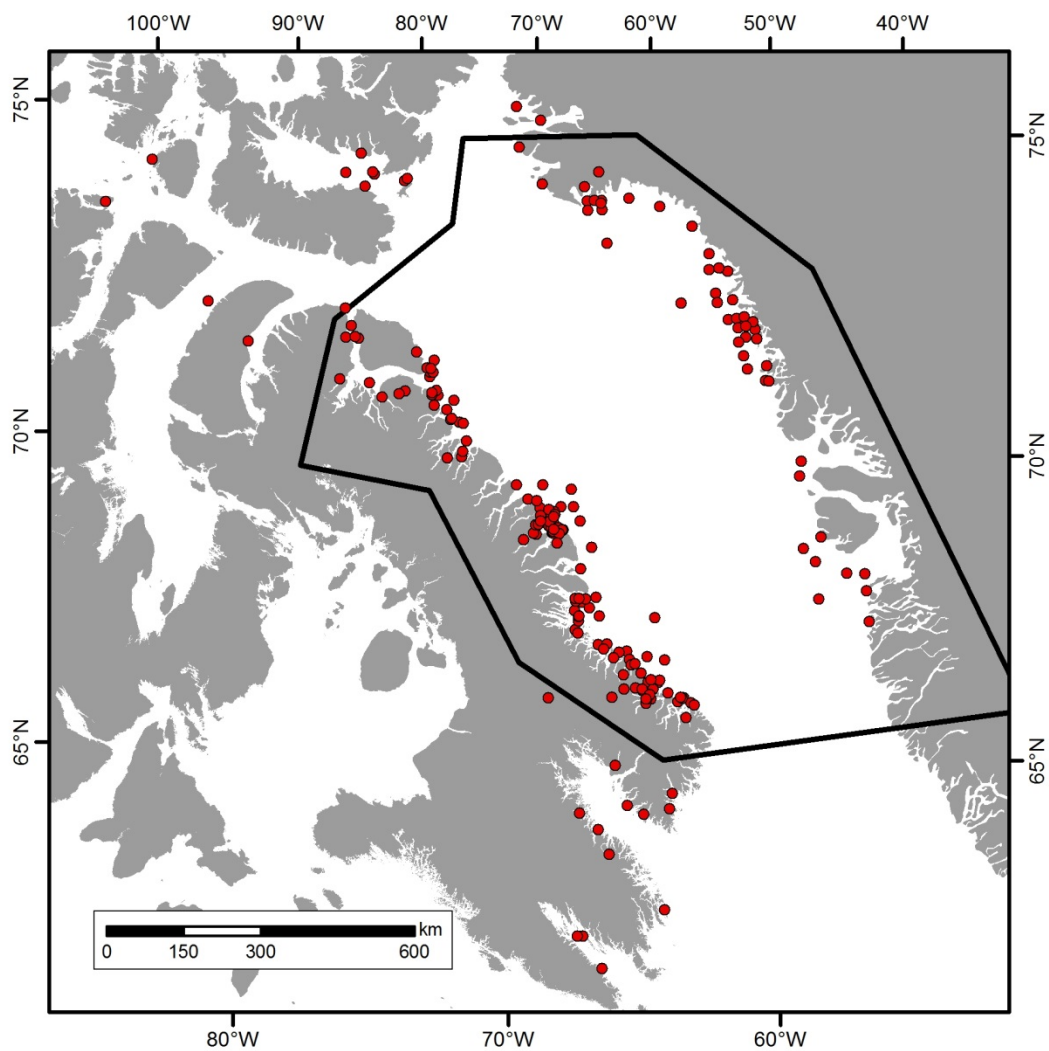
**Figure 5.5.** Left: Pseudart Inc. DNA (top) and Biopsy (bottom) darts used during the 2011 genetic-mark recapture in Baffin Bay. Right: A sample of skin and fat provide by a DNA dart.



**Figure 5.6.** 9-locus mismatch distribution for 4,657 polar bears from Nunavut and the Greenland side of BB.

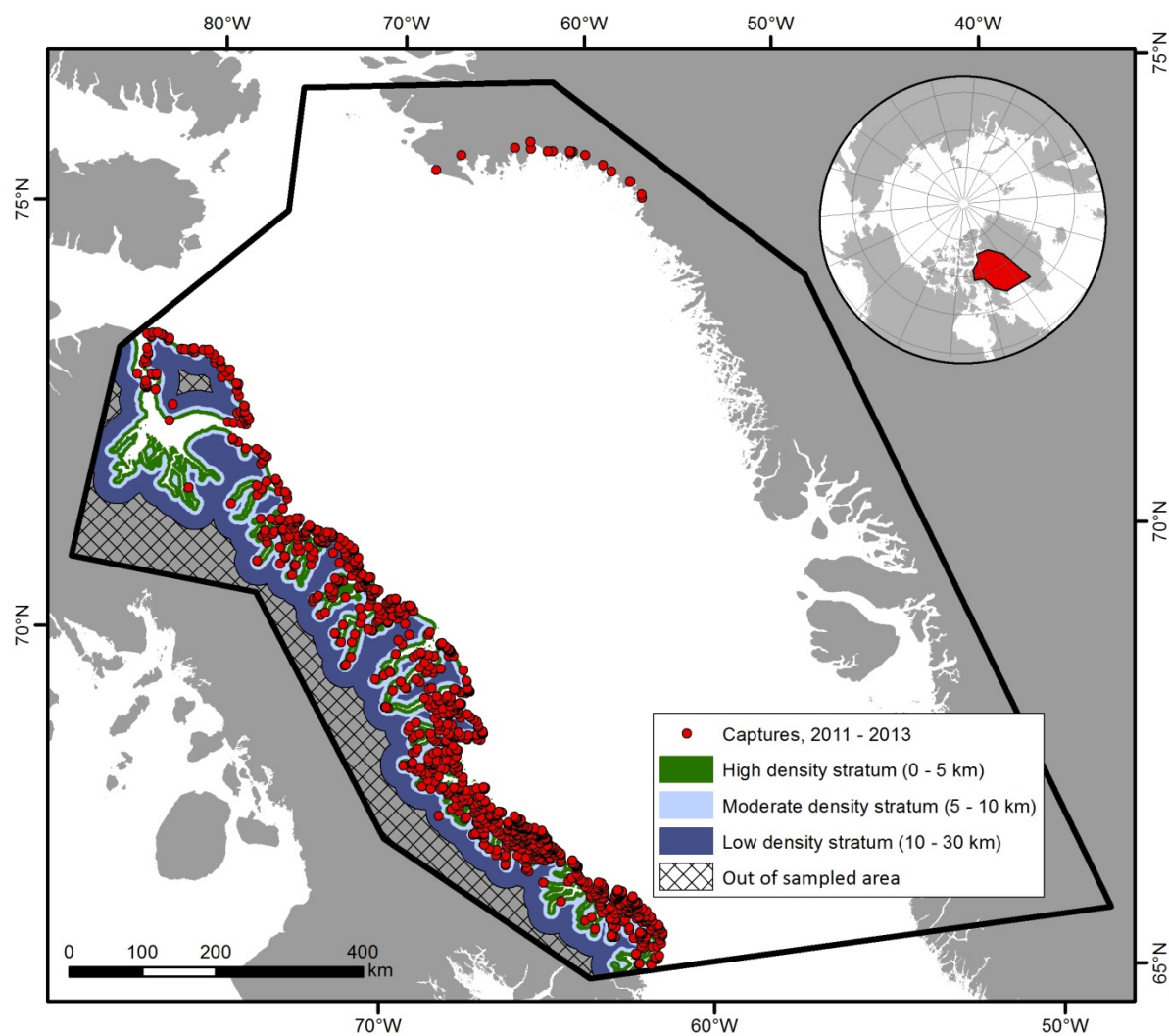


**Figure 5.7.** Locations of marked BB polar bears recovered in the harvest in BB and surrounding subpopulations during 1993 – 2013.

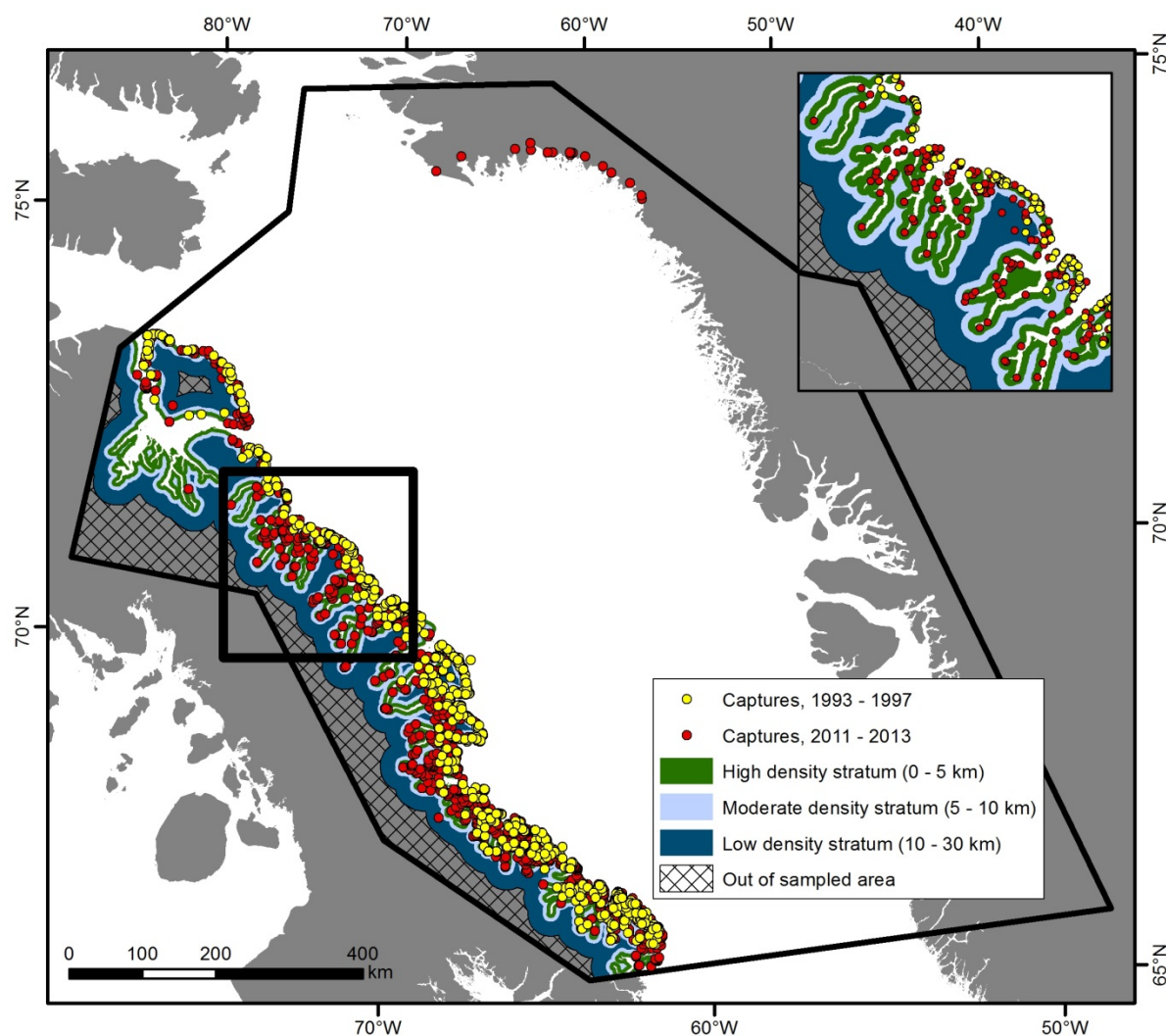




**Figure 5.8.** Locations of polar bears sampled in Baffin Bay during August – October, 2011 – 2013. Sampling in Greenland occurred near Melville Bay.



**Figure 5.9.** Locations of polar bears sampled in Baffin Bay during August – October, 1993 – 1995, 1997 and 2011 – 2013. The region bounded by the black square is enlarged in the inset. Note the absence of captures in fjords on Baffin Island and in northwestern Greenland during the 1990s.



## CHAPTER 6

### REPRODUCTIVE METRICS FOR MARK-RECAPTURE SAMPLED POLAR BEARS IN BAFFIN BAY

#### KEY FINDINGS

- 
- We found little evidence of changes in litter size amongst COY or yearlings in BB. Annual variation in litter size was largely not significant and there were no trends over time or in association with spring transition date.
  - We found evidence of a temporal trend in our index of COY recruitment (calculated as the number of COY per adult female in the MR sample) that was closely associated with variation in sea-ice conditions. From 1993-1995, 1997, 2011-2013, cub recruitment declined concurrent with a trend towards earlier spring sea-ice break-up. Similar declines in reproduction over time and in association with sea-ice conditions have been previously reported for polar bear subpopulations, but not in Baffin Bay.
  - We found evidence of declines in body condition amongst bears in BB, following with previous studies that showed the same (Rode et al. 2012).
  - Estimated annual recruitment (calculated as the number of yearlings per adult female in the MR sample) for BB during 1993-2013 ranged from 0.24 to 0.51, suggesting that BB continues to exhibit the level of reproduction requires for a viable population, according to the metric reported by Regehr et al. (2015), who suggest that variation in yearling recruitment may be a primary mechanism driving changes in population growth with values ranging from 0.1 to 0.3 necessary for population persistence.
  - We found an association between COY recruitment in year  $t$  and yearling recruitment in year  $t + 1$ , as well as a strong association between COY litter size and yearling recruitment to following year. These findings suggest that a majority of mortality of polar bear cubs occurs during the first 8 months of life, such that recruitment of yearlings is heavily dependent on the number of COY that are born and survive up to the first ice-free period. Given the association between COY reproductive metrics and sea ice, and the long-term trends in sea ice in BB, we suspect that a decline in yearling recruitment would be evident with a larger and longer-term data set.
  - Although values in the 2000s tended to be lower than those observed in the 1990s, we did not find a significant temporal trend in annual yearling recruitment. However, given the association between COY reproductive metrics and sea ice, and the long-term trends in sea ice in BB, we suspect that a decline in yearling recruitment would be evident with a larger and longer-term data set.
  - Mean litter sizes in Baffin Bay and the proportions of COY and yearlings were similar to those observed in Foxe Basin and Southern Hudson Bay. In contrast, metrics for Baffin Bay were notably higher than those for estimated for Davis Strait and Western Hudson Bay. These comparisons suggest that BB remains a relatively productive subpopulation despite what appear to be recent declines in reproduction.
-

## 6.1. Introduction

For populations of large, long-lived mammals, changes in reproductive performance can be one of the early indicators of density-dependent regulation and / or changes in environmental carrying capacity (Fowler 1981, 1987). In populations approaching carrying capacity, declines in reproductive performance are likely to occur before declines in adult survival. From both wildlife management and species conservation perspectives, monitoring indices or metrics of reproduction may therefore provide a useful tool for detecting potential population trends that may warrant more in-depth study. This is especially true for populations in which cost or logistical constraints limits the capacity to undertake on-going, intensive demographic studies. In these cases, monitoring reproductive metrics may provide a form of surveillance that can be used to trigger more intensive study.

Reproductive metrics have been identified as an important component for monitoring polar bears across their circumpolar range (Vongraven et al. 2012). These metrics may be used to track long-term trends in the status of subpopulations, parameterize population viability models and support harvest risk assessments (Regehr et al. 2015). In particular, changes in reproduction are predicted to be amongst the first subpopulation-level effects of climate change evident in this species (Derocher et al. 2004, Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Molnar et al. 2011, Stirling and Derocher 2012). Indeed, declines in reproduction have been documented in several polar bear subpopulations in association with long-term changes in sea-ice conditions that appear to be climate induced (Regehr et al. 2007, Rode et al. 2010, Rode et al. 2014).

Changes in reproductive metrics can signal significant changes in subpopulation status of polar bears. However, observations of poor reproductive performance alone do not necessarily

imply a decline in subpopulation status. Studies of several polar bear subpopulations have documented declines in reproduction associated with increases in abundance that may be the result of density dependence (Derocher 2005, Peacock et al. 2013). In other cases, variation in reproductive performance within or amongst subpopulations has been attributed to geographic or annual variation in biological productivity and prey availability (i.e., variable carrying capacity; Stirling and Øritsland 1995, Stirling and Lunn 1997, Stirling 2002, Rode et al. 2014). Information on reproduction must therefore be considered alongside other measures of subpopulation performance in-order to properly assess status.

The Baffin Bay (BB) subpopulation is part of the seasonal ice ecoregion as defined by Amstrup et al. (2008) in which sea ice melts almost entirely in the summer and bears are forced ashore for extended periods of time, during which they have no or reduced access to food. Baffin Bay has experienced a long-term reduction in sea-ice cover and a trend towards earlier spring break-up and later fall freeze-up (Laidre et al. 2015, Chapter 3). As a result, bears are spending an increasing amount of time on land. Previous studies have documented a decline in body condition amongst BB bears in association with these trends in sea ice (Rode et al. 2012), and similar trends were found in the current study (see Chapter 7), however changes in reproductive metrics in BB have not been reported.

We summarized reproductive metrics for the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation using data collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling from 1993 to 1997 (Taylor et al. 2005) and 2011 to 2013 (this report). Annual variation in reproduction was examined to assess trends over time and to evaluate the hypothesis that reproductive performance varied with sea-ice conditions. Because Baffin Bay has been infrequently monitored, we also sought to assess the utility of reproductive metrics as a surveillance tool for monitoring subpopulation status between

periods of more in-depth demographic study, especially since some metrics can be obtained by methods that do not require physical capture (e.g., aerial surveys, harvest monitoring). Finally, we compared reproductive metrics for BB with other subpopulations to make inferences about the relative performance of this subpopulation. Results from these analyses provide context for understanding the status of BB polar bears.

## **6.2. Materials and Methods**

### Study Area

The boundaries of the BB polar bear subpopulation (BB) encompass an area ~1 million km<sup>2</sup> in Baffin Bay, covering portions of Baffin Island and all Bylot Island (66.2°N to 73.8°N) in Nunavut/ Canada and parts of West and Northwest Greenland (66.0°N to 77.0°N; Taylor et al. 2005). BB is bounded by Greenland to the east, Baffin Island to the west, the North Water polynya in the north and Davis Strait to the south. Three communities in Nunavut and 37 communities in Greenland harvest bears from BB, although the majority of the Greenland harvest is taken between *ca.* 72° and 76° N. Baffin Bay is ice-covered in winter but typically ice-free in summer. During late spring and summer break-up, sea ice recedes from Greenland westward across Baffin Bay; the last remnants of ice typically occur off the coast of Baffin Island. Most polar bears remain on the sea ice as it recedes and then come ashore to spend the ice-retreat period on Baffin and Bylot Islands (Taylor et al. 2005). Some bears remain on land in northwestern Greenland throughout the ice-retreat period.

### Field Sampling

Data for the study were collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling in BB, Canada. Sampling occurred along eastern Baffin and Bylot Islands during the ice-free season from late August to mid-October in 1993-95, 1997 and 2011-2013. Most bears in Baffin Bay move onto land on Baffin and Bylot Islands in late summer as the sea ice breaks up and remain on land until freeze-up in the late fall (Taylor et al. 2005). Sampling was extensive across this on-land study area during both periods (1990s and 2000s) of the study (Figure 6.1). The remote biopsy sampling in Greenland conducted in 2012 and 2013 were not included in this analyses.

Various sources of information including traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), expedition reports and unpublished data (Born 1995, Born et al. 2011, GINR unpublished data) indicate that a presumably relatively small proportion of the BB subpopulation summers in the Qimmusseriaruaq / Melville Bay area of NW Greenland rather than moving with the retreating sea ice and summering on Baffin and Bylot Islands.

During the 1990s, bears were sampled by physical capture and examination using methods previously described (Taylor et al. 2005). Data on the sex, estimated age-class and reproductive status of each individual were recorded. Age of individuals was determined based on previous capture history, known (in the case of cubs and yearlings) or estimated from counts of annular rings in an extracted vestigial premolar tooth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998). Individuals were identified by means of uniquely numbered ear tags and lip tattoos. Group size, family status, location and date were also recorded.

During the 2000s, sampling occurred by biopsy darting and subsequent genetic analysis to determine genetic sex and identify individuals. We remotely estimated sex and age class (cub-of-the-year, yearling, subadult [ages 2 – 4], and adult) from the air at a range of 10-20 feet above ground. Sex was later confirmed via genetic analysis. In estimating age-class and sex, the

observer used multiple cues, including the size of an individual relative to its surrounding environment or accompanying bears, membership in a family group (mothers and cubs or yearlings), secondary sexual characteristics (adult males, e.g., fore-leg guard hairs), body shape and proportions, the presence of scars (which are most often seen on adult males) and observations of urination (i.e., urine dribbling from under tail in females). Field notes also assisted in *post-hoc* reassessment of age-sex class once genetic sex was known. Age-class was later verified in some bears from previous or future captures in which an individual was captured and physically examined or where an individual was matched via DNA to membership in a known family at some past or future point. We assessed the accuracy of this system for estimating the age-class and sex of polar bears using a sample of BB bears of known age-class (Appendix B).

### Reproductive Metrics

We calculated annual reproductive metrics that have been previously recommended (Vongraven et al. 2012) or used in studies of polar bears (e.g., Stirling et al. 1980, Derocher and Stirling 1995, Rode et al. 2010, Peacock et al. 2013, Regehr et al. 2015), including mean litter sizes ( $\pm$  SD) for cubs-of-the-year (COY) and yearlings. Because we did not have estimated ages for adult females sampled during 2011-2013, we calculated a pooled mean for each year rather than age-specific values. Recruitment indices were calculated as the total number of COYs or yearlings divided by the total number of adult females in the sample (Derocher and Stirling 1995, Regehr et al. 2015). Calculation of reproductive metrics considered only those COY and yearlings accompanying their mother at time of observation. During the 1990s, approximately 6% of yearlings were found to be independent of their mother during the ice-free period (GN



unpublished data). These independent yearlings were not included in the calculation of yearling recruitment since we were not able to identify independent yearlings encountered during the 2000s sampling period with a known degree of accuracy.

Although Taylor et al. (2005) reported that search effort during the 1990s was uniform and systematic across the coastal regions, islands, and inland reaches of Baffin Island, recent examination of mark-recapture and telemetry data collected in the 1990s suggest sampling was spatially restricted to a portion of the BB subpopulation's seasonal range and did not sample bears located farther inland or on the sea ice (GN unpublished data, Chapter 3). In contrast, sampling during 2011 – 2013 was more comprehensive and systematic on onshore areas, and the amount of un-searched sea ice during the sampling period was greatly reduced. To explore the potential impact of this difference in sampling between epochs on the calculation of reproductive metrics, we estimated and delineated the minimum extent of the sampling frame from the 1990s using capture locations in a GIS. We subset the 2000s data using this layer to create a dataset collected over the same sampling area in both time periods. We then recalculated reproductive metrics using this geographic subset. We expected that reproductive metrics calculated for the 2000s using the subset sampling area would reduce potential bias by adjusting for bears that may have been functionally missed by the limited geographic scope of sampling on land in the 1990s, given that satellite telemetry data indicated that onshore habitat use did not vary between epochs. However, we note that this geographic subset exercise would not correct for bears that may have been missed during the 1990s due to their location on the sea ice during the fall sampling period. Within season recaptures of individuals were excluded from both data sets for analyses.

### Sea-ice Metrics

Based on findings from other studies (Stirling et al. 1999, Durner et al. 2004, 2006, 2009, Regehr et al. 2007, Rode et al. 2010, 2014), we hypothesized that timing of sea-ice break-up over the continental shelf (< 300m depth) of BB may influence the annual reproductive performance of polar bears as indexed from data collected during the ice-free period. We therefore calculated the annual sea-ice metric, spring transition date, as day of the year (1-365) when ice area over the continental shelf of BB reached 50% in the spring (see Chapter 2 for methodology). Whereas some researchers have used lower sea ice thresholds for studying polar bears (e.g., Cherry et al. 2013, Rode et al. 2014, Obbard et al. 2016), the exact threshold level is less important in Baffin Bay because the changes in sea-ice area during spring and fall occur quickly, such that relatively small differences in transition dates result from small changes in the threshold values (Laidre et al. 2015). For sea ice in Baffin Bay, spring transition date is also correlated with other sea-ice metrics including fall transition date (negative correlation) and the interval between spring and fall transitions (Laidre et al. 2015).

We examined annual variation, temporal trends, and relationships to sea ice for reproductive metrics. Similar to Rode et al. (2014), we did not include both time and sea ice in the same analyses since long-term trends in the spring transition date were well-established *a priori* (Laidre et al. 2015, this report) and these two parameters were correlated over the 7 years of sampling (Pearson coefficient = -0.846,  $p = 0.017$ ). We also examined relationships between metrics for COYs and those for yearlings in the following year for periods when sampling occurred in successive years.

To examine temporal trends in reproductive metrics and associations with sea ice, we used weighted least squares regression (General Linear Model procedure), with number of litters

sampled each year as the weighting variable. Statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS package (Version 24.0, IBM Corp. 2016).

### 6.3. Results

During mark-recapture sampling in 1993-1995, 1997, and 2011-2013, we sampled 251 family groups consisting of an adult female and 1-3 dependent COY (400 COY in total; Table 6.1). During this period we also sampled 152 family groups consisting of an adult female and 1-3 dependent yearlings (231 yearlings in total). The mean number of family groups sampled annually was 35.9 (range: 16-62) and 21.7 (range: 8-44) for COY and yearling families respectively. From these data we created a second subsampled dataset base on geographic location to exclude bears that were encountered outside the standardized sampling area as described previously. This geographic subset consisted of 191 COY family groups containing 1-3 dependent COY (300 COYs in total) and 105 yearling family groups containing 1-3 dependent yearlings (160 yearling in total; Table 6.2). The mean number of family groups sampled annually was 27.3 (range: 16-48) and 15.0 (range: 8-25) for COY and yearling families respectively. Annual reproductive metrics for these two datasets are presented in Tables 6.1 and 6.2.

#### Litter Size

There was annual variation in mean litter size amongst adult females with COYs but differences amongst years were non-significant for both the full (Kruskal-Wallis,  $P = 0.153$ ) and geographic subset (Kruskal-Wallis,  $P = 0.069$ ) data (Figure 6.2). For adult females with yearlings, differences in mean annual litter size were not significant for the full dataset (Kruskal-

Wallis,  $P = 0.051$ ). For the subset data, differences in mean yearling litter size were significant (Kruskal-Wallis,  $P = 0.035$ ) with both 1997 and 2013 having significantly lower litter sizes than 1994 and 1993 (Bonferonni correction for multiple comparisons,  $P < 0.050$  in each case; Figure 6.3).

There were no statistically significant temporal trends in annual COY or yearling mean litter size from 1993 to 2013 (Table 6.3). Similarly, mean litter sizes were not associated with date of spring sea-ice transition.

### Recruitment

COY recruitment showed a significant negative temporal trend from 1993 to 2013 for the geographic subset data, but not the full dataset (Table 6.3). COY recruitment also exhibited a positive association with date of spring sea-ice transition (Figure 6.4) for both the full and geographic subset data (i.e., later spring break-up was associated with higher COY recruitment). For yearlings, annual recruitment was not associated with either time or spring transition date (Figure 6.4).

There were 4 instances where sampling occurred over 2 successive years: 1993-94, 1994-95, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013. For these back-to-back years we compared reproductive metrics for COY (time  $t$ ) to those of yearlings in the following year (time  $t+1$ ). There was no relationship between annual mean litter size for COY in year  $t$  and yearling litter size in year  $t + 1$  (Table 6.4; Figure 6.5). COY recruitment was positively associated with yearling recruitment the following year for the geographic subset data but not the full dataset. COY litter size was closely associated with yearling recruitment in the following year for both datasets (Table 6.4; Figure 6.5), such that higher mean COY litter size in year  $t$  resulted in higher yearling

recruitment in year  $t + 1$ . We also examined the relationship between yearling reproductive metrics and spring ice transition date the previous year finding no association for either the full ( $F_{1,6} = 0.128$ ,  $r^2 = 0.025$ ,  $P = 0.735$ ) or subset data sets ( $F_{1,6} = 0.095$ ,  $r^2 = 0.019$ ,  $P = 0.771$ ).

## 6.4. Discussion

Calculating annual reproductive metrics from mark-recapture field data is subject to several potential sources of error, including non-random sampling with respect to the overall study subpopulation. Similar to other seasonally ice-free subpopulations (e.g., Derocher and Stirling 1990), polar bears in Baffin Bay are known to exhibit a degree of spatial segregation by sex, age class and reproductive status with respect to the use of terrestrial habitat during the ice-free period (Ferguson et al. 1997; Chapter 4). For example, adult females with cubs tend to select fjords and avoid offshore islands and coastal regions where densities of adult males are higher (Ferguson et al. 1997). Pregnant bears select inland and upland denning habitats (Chapter 3). Mark-recapture sampling in the 1990s was more restricted in geographic extent relative to the 2010s (Chapter 3). The extent to which this difference in sampling between the two time periods introduced error and more importantly, systematic bias into our estimates of reproduction, cannot be fully evaluated. However, sampling bias is unlikely to account for the results of our analyses for several reasons. First, we attempted to account for differences in sampling by restricting some analyses to data collected within a standardized sampling area. This made little difference to the results. Results based on full and subset data were very similar. Second, sampling bias between the 1990s and 2000s would not account for the temporal trends in reproduction or associations with the timing of spring sea-ice transition unless sampling bias varied in proportion to these factors; something that is unlikely. Third, under-sampling of fjord

habitats in the 1990s may have introduced bias in sampling of adult females with offspring. However, the most likely impact of this bias would have been underestimation of recruitment indices since fewer adult females with offspring would have been sampled relative to adult females overall. Fourth, sampling bias would not account for the association observed between reproductive metrics in successive years and the closeness of this association in some cases.

Another source of error in estimation of reproductive parameters in our study originated from the misclassification of bears that were observed from the air rather than handled during 2011-2013. However, when combined with genetic sexing, the accuracy of this method of classification is high even for lone adult females<sup>1</sup> (Appendix B). Furthermore, this source of error does not necessarily introduce systematic bias. Lone adult females could only have been misclassified as lone subadult females (and vice-versa), and there is no evidence to suggest inaccuracy in this area favours one age-class versus the other.

Finally, analyses of telemetry data collected from collared adult females suggest that a proportion of collar bears remained on the remnant sea ice in some years during the 1990s and were unavailable for sampling (Chapter 3). Although this could have introduced bias if certain classes of bears tended to remain on the ice while others moved to shore, we were unable to correct for this potential source of bias. However, the most likely effect would have been over-representation of lone (pregnant) adult females in our sampling data since this is the class of adult females that has an obligate need to come ashore to look for suitable denning habitat. This, in turn, would have led to underestimation of recruitment in the 1990s relative to the 2000s.

### Litter Size

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately 84% of lone adult females were correctly classified (GN unpublished data; see chapter 5, appendix 1.)

We found little evidence of changes in litter size amongst COY or yearlings in BB. Annual variation in litter size was for the most part not significant and there were no trends over time or in association with spring transition date. This finding is consistent with Molnar et al. (2011), who found that although litter size is predicted to vary in response to changes in maternal body condition and environmental conditions, it is a relatively insensitive reproductive metric. Large changes in maternal condition and environment are necessary to produce statistically significant differences in litter size. Litter size does, however, remain an important reproductive metric for monitoring polar bear subpopulations (Vongraven et al. 2012). Changes in litter size have been associated with temporal and geographic variation in ecosystem productivity (Stirling and Lunn 1997, Peacock et al. 2013), and long-term trends have been detected in association with changing subpopulation status (Derocher and Stirling 1995).

#### Trends in COY Recruitment and Association with Sea-ice Conditions

We found evidence of a temporal trend in our index of COY recruitment that was also closely associated with variation in sea-ice conditions. From 1993 to 2013, cub recruitment declined concurrent with a trend towards earlier spring sea-ice break-up. Similar declines in reproduction over time and in association with sea-ice conditions have been previously reported for polar bear subpopulations (Derocher and Stirling 1995, Derocher 2005, Rode et al. 2010, Peacock et al. 2013, Rode et al. 2014), but not in Baffin Bay. Earlier spring break-up (also associated with later fall freeze-up) presumably decreases feeding opportunities for polar bears, thereby resulting in poorer maternal body condition and reduced investment in reproduction. This, in turn, will be manifested as reduced natality rates and / or lower offspring survival. Our index of cub recruitment incorporates both of these parameters reflecting to an unknown degree a

blend of decreased cub production and lowered cub survival over the first 8 months of life. The association between cub recruitment and spring transition date in our study suggests that lower cub survival from birth to the first ice-free season may be a primary mechanism driving lower reproduction in Baffin Bay. However, we have not demonstrated a causal relationship; other factors may play an important role in cub recruitment, particularly since recruitment was associated with both time (year) and spring transition date. These two parameters are correlated with one another and may also be associated with other parameters that we did not consider. As such, there is some uncertainty as to the extent to which declining reproduction in BB is mediated by sea-ice conditions.

Declining reproduction and body condition are amongst the first subpopulation level effects predicted occur in polar bears as a result of climate change (Derocher et al. 2004, Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Molnar et al. 2011, Stirling and Derocher 2012). Our evidence of a decline in reproduction in BB from 1993 to 2013 is accompanied by evidence of concurrent declines in body condition amongst bears in this subpopulation over the same period (Rode et al. 2012, Chapter 6). These changes may signal a reduction in the carrying capacity of BB. Although the point estimate of abundance from our recent genetic mark-recapture was higher than the 1990s estimate, the difference between estimates was not statistically significant (Chapter 5).

Additionally, differences in these point estimates may be largely explained by differences in sampling design between the two time periods. Regardless of whether density effects are at play, if the observed association between sea ice and reproduction is real and the well documented trend in sea-ice continues, it is reasonable to expect that this subpopulation will experience significant changes in reproductive performance as a result of declining habitat (Laidre et al. 2015).



### Yearling Recruitment

Recruitment calculated as the number of yearlings per adult female has been identified as an important reproductive metric to monitor in polar bear subpopulations, incorporating both natality and survival of COY (Vongraven et al. 2012). Regehr et al. (2015) suggest that variation in yearling recruitment may be a primary mechanism driving changes in subpopulation growth, with values ranging from 0.1 to 0.3 necessary for subpopulation persistence. Estimated annual recruitment values for Baffin Bay during 1993 to 2013 ranged from 0.24 to 0.51, suggesting that BB continues to function as a viable subpopulation, according to this metric. Interestingly, in contrast to previous studies (e.g., Rode et al. 2010, 2014), we did not find evidence that yearling recruitment was associated with sea-ice conditions. Instead, our results suggest that recruitment of yearlings is largely determined by reproductive metrics for COYs in the previous year. We found an association between COY recruitment in year  $t$  and yearling recruitment in year  $t + 1$ , as well as a strong association between COY litter size and yearling recruitment to following year. These findings suggest that a majority of mortality of polar bear cubs occurs during the first 8 months of life, such that recruitment of yearlings is heavily dependent on the number of COY that are born and survive up to the first ice-free period. Since COY recruitment itself appears to be associated with spring transition date, yearling recruitment up to the ice-free period may be influenced to a greater degree by ice conditions the previous year than by ice conditions in the current year. We did not find evidence of this lag effect but our sample size was very small.

Although values in the 2000s tended to be lower than those observed in the 1990s, we did not find a significant temporal trend in annual yearling recruitment. However, given the

association between COY reproductive metrics and sea ice, and the long-term trends in sea ice in BB, we suspect that a decline in yearling recruitment would be evident with a larger and longer-term data set. In this context, we suggest that monitoring annual litter size of COY may be a useful tool for tracking trends in recruitment in the absence of more intensive subpopulation studies. This metric can be readily acquired from aerial surveys without capture or biopsy of bears, without the need for extensive observer experience in identifying age-sex classes, and at relatively low cost. Our very limited data suggest that mean annual COY litter size is closely related to yearling recruitment the following year. However, we acknowledge that the robustness of this relationship has not been validated with a larger data set and under a range of environmental conditions.

#### Comparison with other Subpopulations

Indices of reproduction for BB were comparable to other polar bear subpopulations in the seasonal ice ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008) that have been recently studied by mark-recapture or aerial survey (Table 6.5). Mean litter sizes in Baffin Bay and the proportions of COY and yearlings were similar to those observed in Foxe Basin (Stapleton et al. 2016) and Southern Hudson Bay (Obbard et al. 2015); two subpopulations classified as stable (PBSG 2010). In contrast, metrics for Baffin Bay were notably higher than those estimated for Davis Strait (Peacock et al. 2013) and Western Hudson Bay (Lunn et al. 2014). These comparisons suggest that BB remains a relatively productive subpopulation despite apparent recent declines in reproduction.

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**Table 6.1.** Reproductive metrics for annual mark-recapture sampling data from Baffin Bay. Full dataset.

Year	Mean Litter Size		Recruitment Index <sup>2</sup>	
	(n, SD)		(Offspring/adult female)	
	COY	Yearling <sup>1</sup>	COY	Yearlings <sup>1</sup>
<b>1993</b>	1.63 (16, 0.50)	1.75 (8, 0.46)	0.79	0.42
<b>1994</b>	1.87 (23, 0.51)	1.82 (11, 0.38)	0.83	0.38
<b>1995</b>	1.52 (21, 0.51)	1.64 (14, 0.63)	0.71	0.51
<b>1997</b>	1.64 (25, 0.49)	1.25 (12, 0.45)	0.65	0.24
<b>2011</b>	1.57 (58, 0.50)	1.53 (34, 0.51)	0.68	0.39
<b>2012</b>	1.47 (62, 0.50)	1.55 (44, 0.54)	0.47	0.35
<b>2013</b>	1.65 (46, 0.49)	1.34 (29, 0.49)	0.60	0.31

<sup>1</sup> Dependent yearlings only. Capture data for 1993-97 suggests up to 6% of yearlings are independent of their mother in the fall

<sup>2</sup> Calculated per Derocher and Stirling (1995), Vongraven et al. (2012), Regehr et al. (2015)

**Table 6.2.** Reproductive metrics for annual mark-recapture sampling data from Baffin Bay.

Data for 2011-13 were filtered to exclude individuals encountered outside the area where sampling was estimated to have occurred in the 1990s.

Year	Mean Litter Size (n, SD)		Recruitment Index <sup>2</sup> (Offspring/adult female)	
	COY	Yearling <sup>1</sup>	COY	Yearlings <sup>1</sup>
<b>1993</b>	1.63 (16, 0.50)	1.75 (8, 0.46)	0.79	0.42
<b>1994</b>	1.87 (23, 0.51)	1.82 (11, 0.38)	0.83	0.38
<b>1995</b>	1.52 (21, 0.51)	1.64 (14, 0.63)	0.71	0.51
<b>1997</b>	1.64 (25, 0.49)	1.25 (12, 0.45)	0.65	0.24
<b>2011</b>	1.48 (33, 0.51)	1.60 (20, 0.50)	0.61	0.40
<b>2012</b>	1.42 (48, 0.50)	1.48 (25, 0.51)	0.55	0.30
<b>2013</b>	1.64 (25, 0.49)	1.27 (15, 0.46)	0.55	0.26

<sup>1</sup> Dependent yearlings only. Capture data for 1993-97 suggests up to 6% of yearlings are independent of their mother in the fall

<sup>2</sup> Calculated per Derocher and Stirling (1995), Vongraven et al. (2012), Regehr et al. (2015)



**Table 6.3.** Results of least squares regressions for annual reproductive metrics derived from mark-recapture sampling of polar bears during the ice-free period (August-October) in Baffin Bay. Number of litters was used as a weighting variable. Significant relationships in bold.

Reproductive Metric	Litter Age	Explanatory Variable	Dataset	$F_{1,6}$	$r^2$	$P$
Litter Size	COY	Year	Full	1.64	0.25	0.256
Litter Size	COY	Year	Subset	3.37	0.40	0.126
Litter Size	COY	Spring Ice Transition	Full	3.42	0.41	0.124
Litter Size	COY	Spring Ice Transition	Subset	3.92	0.44	0.105
Litter Size	Yearling	Year	Full	1.22	0.20	0.319
Litter Size	Yearling	Year	Subset	1.16	0.19	0.331
Litter Size	Yearling	Spring Ice Transition	Full	1.64	0.25	0.256
Litter Size	Yearling	Spring Ice Transition	Subset	1.38	0.22	0.293
Recruitment	COY	Year	Full	5.34	0.52	0.069
Recruitment	COY	Year	Subset	22.43	0.82	<b>0.005</b>
Recruitment	COY	Spring Ice Transition	Full	53.90	0.92	<b>0.001</b>
Recruitment	COY	Spring Ice Transition	Subset	11.60	0.70	<b>0.019</b>
Recruitment	Yearling	Year	Full	0.72	0.13	0.434
Recruitment	Yearling	Year	Subset	1.37	0.21	0.295
Recruitment	Yearling	Spring Ice Transition	Full	0.64	0.11	0.460
Recruitment	Yearling	Spring Ice Transition	Subset	1.91	0.28	0.225

**Table 6.4.** Results of least squares regressions for annual reproductive metrics derived in year  $t$  and year  $t+1$  from mark-recapture sampling of polar bears during the ice-free period (August-October) in Baffin Bay, Canada. Number of litters in year  $t+1$  was used as a weighting variable.

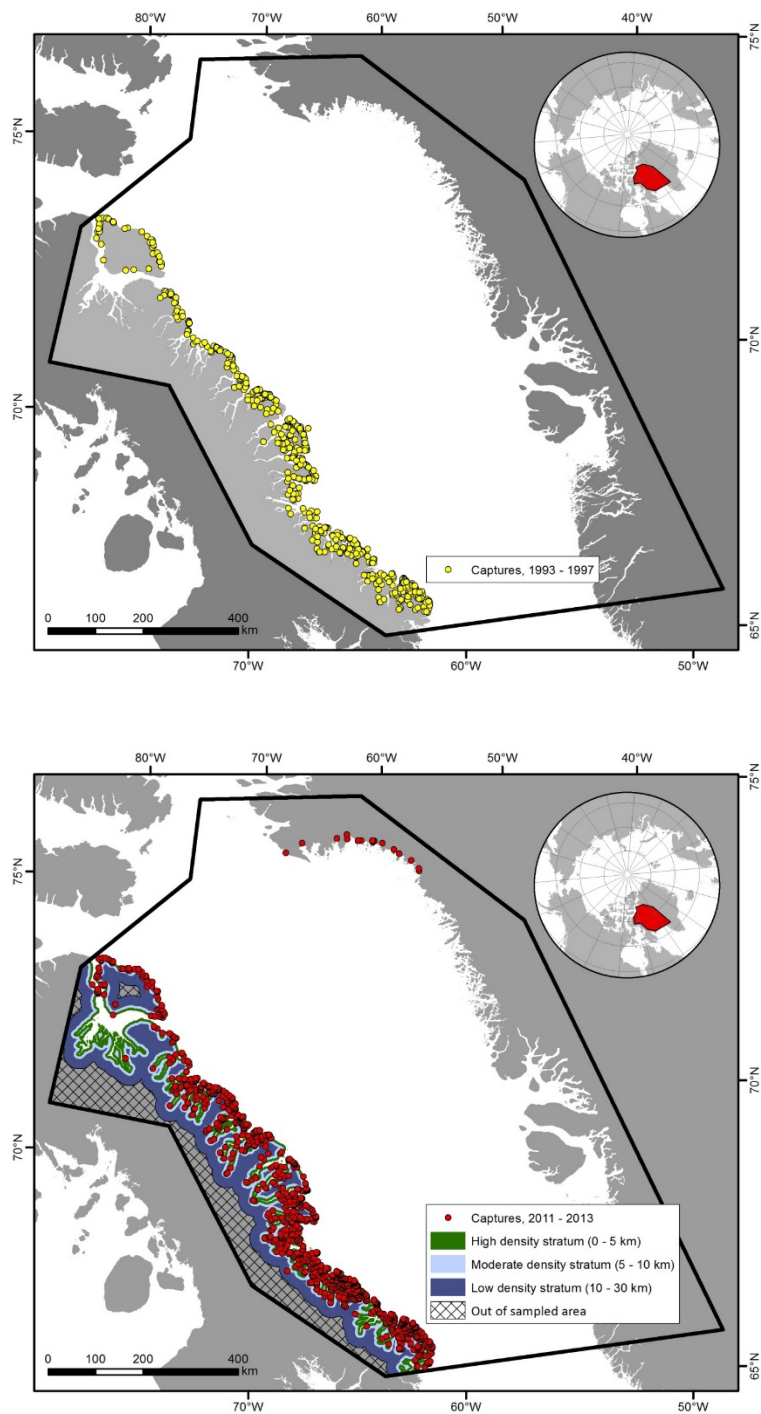
Reproductive Metric (year $t$ )	Reproductive Metric (year $t+1$ )	Dataset	$F_{1,3}$	$r^2$	$P$
COY Litter Size	Yearling Litter Size	Full	0.80	0.29	0.465
COY Litter Size	Yearling Litter Size	Subset	0.92	0.29	0.431
COY Recruitment	Yearling Recruitment	Full	3.88	0.66	0.188
COY Recruitment	Yearling Recruitment	Subset	20.33	0.91	<b>0.046</b>
COY Litter Size	Yearling Recruitment	Full	474.43	0.99	<b>0.002</b>
COY Litter Size	Yearling Recruitment	Subset	1854.94	0.99	<b>0.001</b>

**Table 6.5.** Comparison of reproductive metrics for polar bear subpopulations in the seasonal ice ecoregion. Sampling occurred during ice-free periods.

Subpopulation	Mean Litter Size		Proportion of Total Observations <sup>2</sup>		Source
	COY	Yearling	COY	Yearlings	
Baffin Bay (1993-97)	1.67	1.60	0.16	0.09	Taylor et al. (2005)
Baffin Bay (2011-13) <sup>1</sup>	1.55	1.48	0.15	0.09	This study
Davis Strait (2005-07)	1.49	1.22	0.08	0.09	Peacock et al. (2013)
Foxe Basin (2009-2010)	1.55	1.48	0.13	0.10	Stapleton et al. (2016)
Southern Hudson Bay (2011)	1.56	1.49	0.16	0.12	Obbard et al. (2015)
Western Hudson Bay (2011)	1.43	1.22	0.07	0.03	Stapleton et al. (2014)

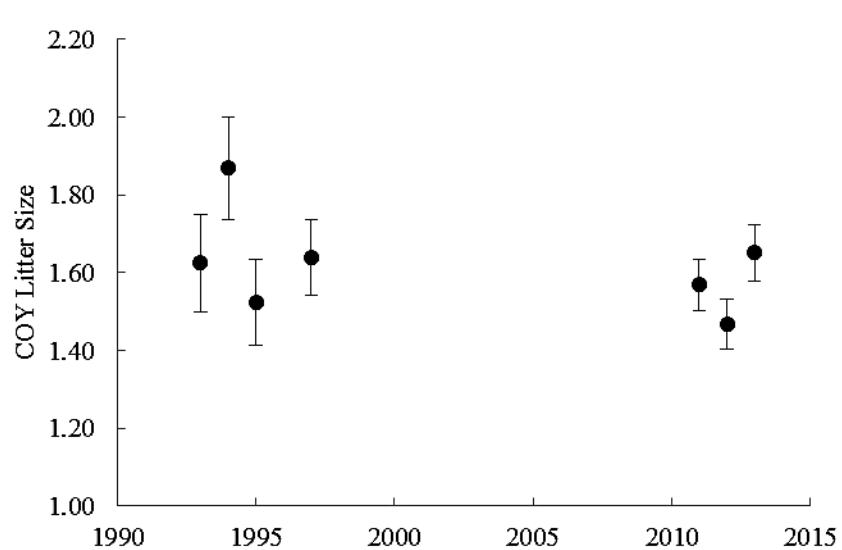
<sup>1</sup> Based on sampling across study area

<sup>2</sup> Some of these recent studies relied on aerial survey which is less accurate in identifying adult females (without genotyping to determine sex). For this reason we used published data on mean litter sizes and the proportion of COY and yearlings within these studies rather than calculating indices of recruitment used in the present study

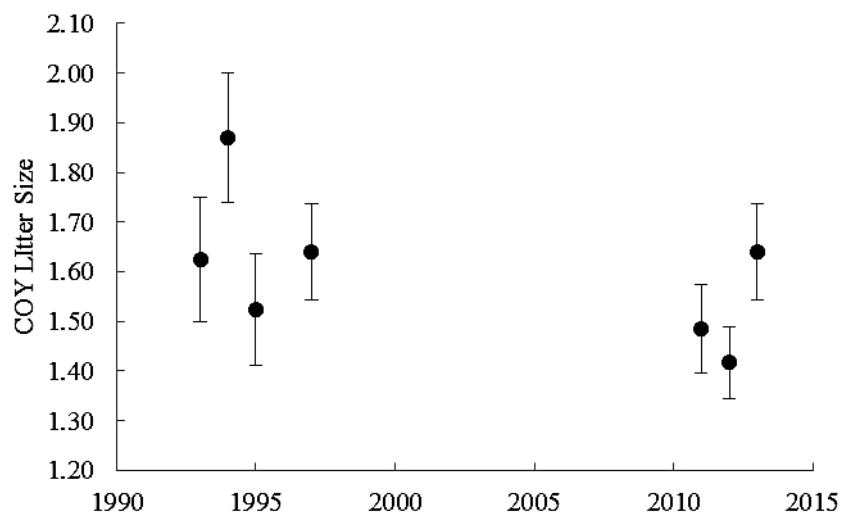


**Figure 6.1.** Spatial distribution of bears recorded during sampling in the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation, 1993 – 1995, 1997 (top), and 2011 – 2013 (bottom).

(a)

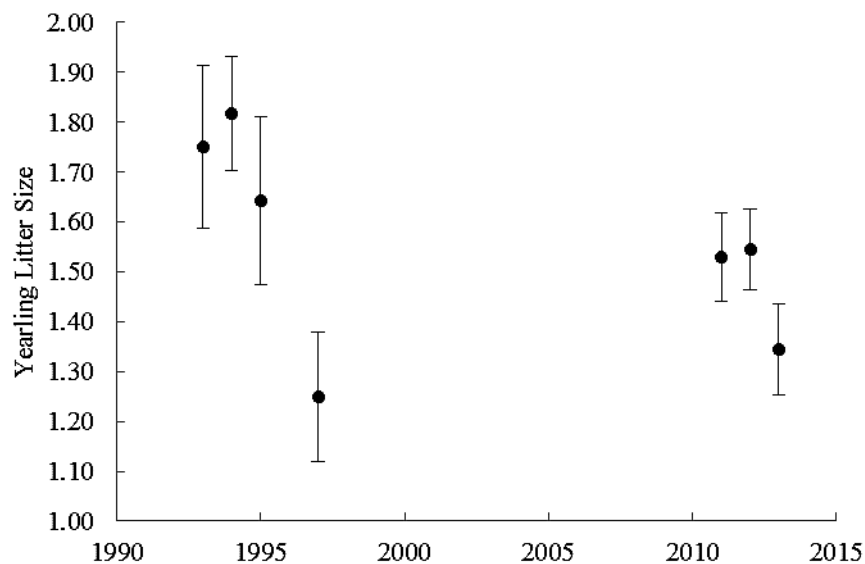


(b)

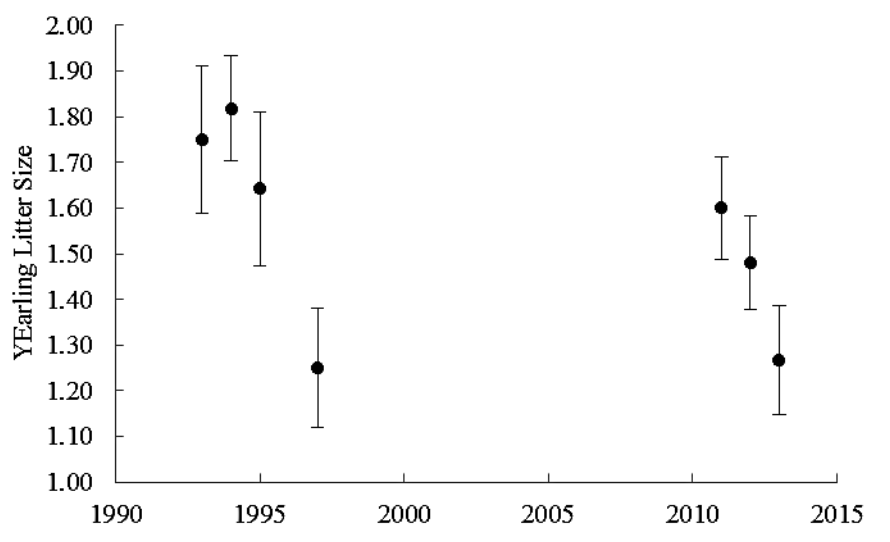


**Figure 6.2.** Mean litter sizes ( $\pm$  SE) for adult females with cubs-of the year (COY) during the ice-free period in Baffin Bay. Calculated using the (a) full and (b) geographically subset data (see text).

(a)

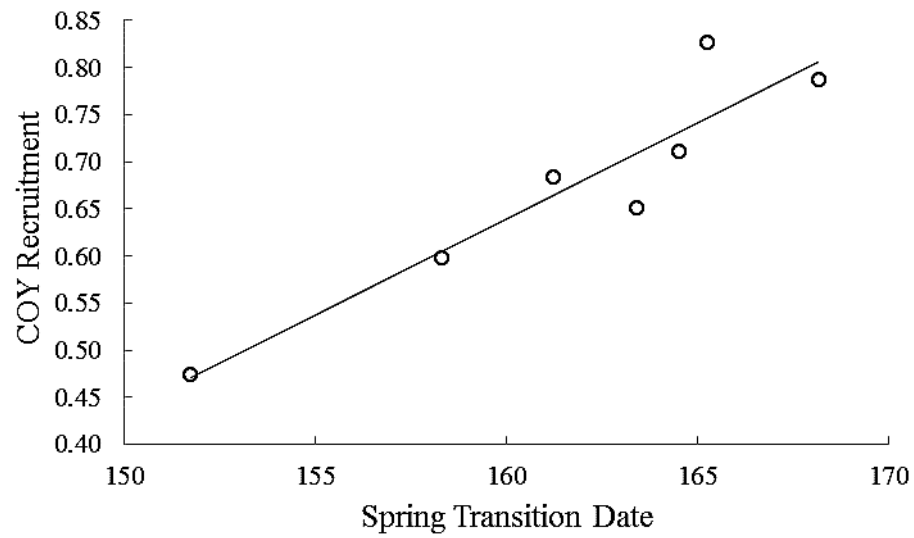


(b)

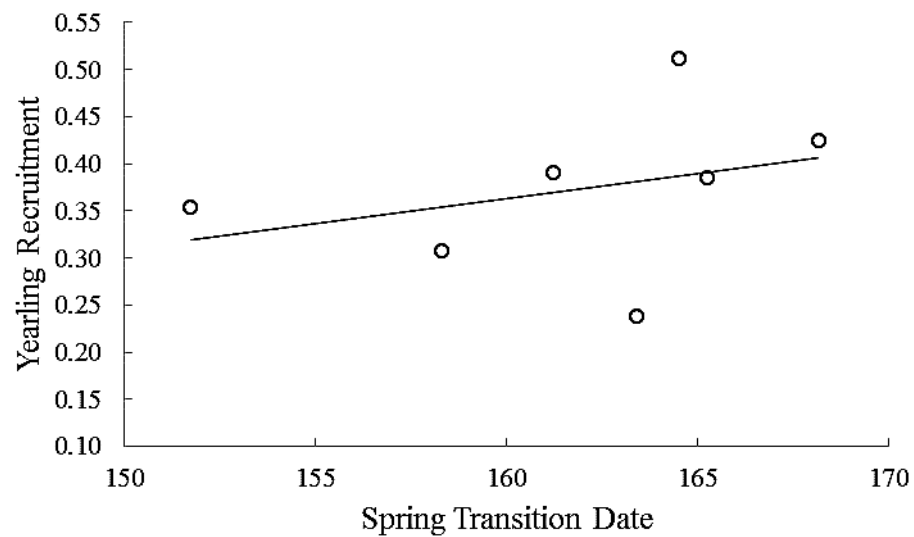


**Figure 6.3.** Mean litter sizes ( $\pm$  SE) for adult females with yearlings during the ice-free period in Baffin Bay. Calculated using the (a) full and (b) geographically subset data (see text).

(a)

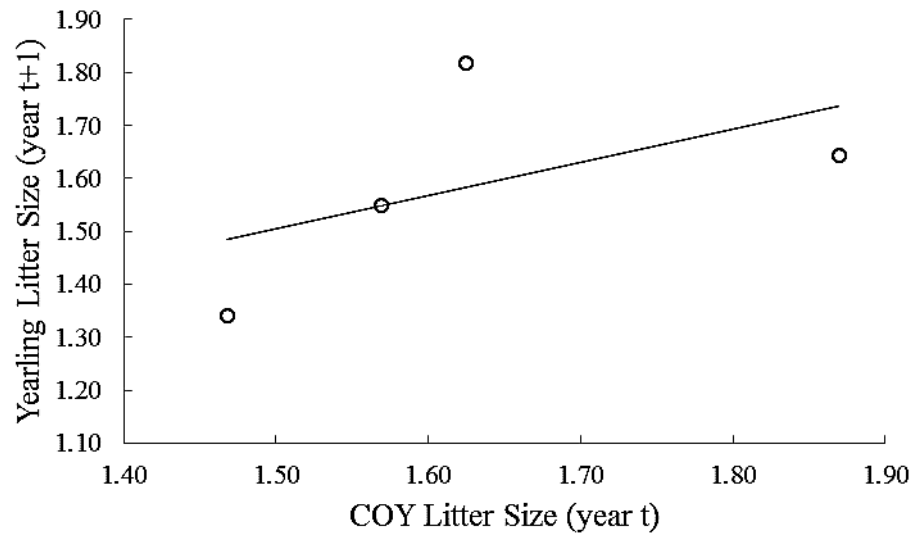


(b)

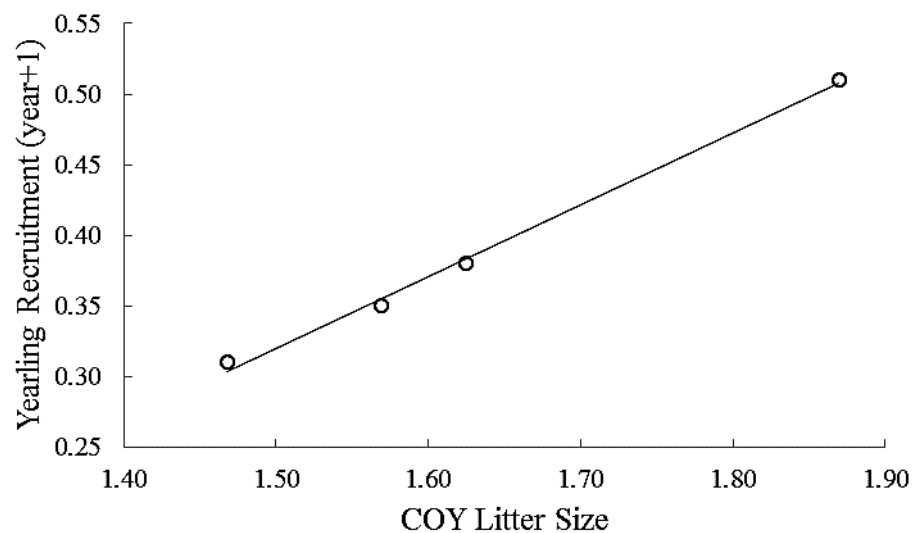


**Figure 6.4.** The relationship between spring transition date and annual recruitment index for (a) cub-of-the-year and (b) yearling polar bears during the ice free period (August-October), in Baffin Bay. Recruitment calculated as the number of COY or yearlings per adult female in the sample subpopulation using the full mark-recapture dataset.

(a)



(b)



**Figure 6.5.** The relationship between mean annual litter size amongst cub-of-the-year litters and (a) yearling litter size and (b) yearling recruitment in the following year (year +1). Data are for polar bears sampled during the ice free period (August-October), in Baffin Bay. Metrics calculated using full mark-recapture dataset.



## CHAPTER 7

### BODY CONDITION OF BAFFIN BAY POLAR BEARS

#### KEY FINDINGS

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- Fatness index (FI) scores were collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling in BB, 1993-1995, 1997 and 2011-2013. We examined trends in this metric of body condition across both sampling periods in relation to sea-ice conditions.  
We found evidence of declines in body condition amongst bears in BB over the period
  - 1993 to 2013. Body condition in BB polar bears declined in close association with the ice-free period and spring sea-ice transition dates. This is consistent with the hypothesis that reduced time on the sea ice is a primary mechanism driving this decline.
  - Our results follow with previous studies that showed similar results through 2010 with different metrics derived from physical handling of bears (Rode et al. 2012).  
The springtime aerial survey was successfully implemented due to the small geographic
  - These findings are consistent with available traditional knowledge suggesting that body condition of polar bears in BB was poorer in the early 2000s relative to the 1990s (Dowsley and Wenzel 2008, Born et al. 2011).  
We found evidence of recent foraging in approximately 9% of the BB bears observed
  - during the on-land period. Marine mammals, in particular seals and walrus made up almost half of the identifiable food sources.
- 

#### 7.1. Background

For populations of large, long-lived mammals changes in body condition will be among the early indicators of density-dependent regulation and / or changes in environmental carrying capacity (Fowler 1987, 1990, Zedrosser et al. 2006). In populations approaching K, declines in condition will occur before declines in adult survival. From both wildlife management and species conservation perspectives, monitoring body condition may therefore provide a useful tool for the early detection of population trends that warrant more in-depth study. This is especially true for populations where cost or logistical constraints limits the capacity to undertake on-going, intensive demographic studies. In these cases, monitoring condition may provide a form of surveillance that can be used to trigger periods of more intensive study.

The annual life-cycle of polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) is characterized by large seasonal changes in body condition (Watts and Hansen 1987, Ramsay et al. 1992, Ramsay and Stirling 1988, Atkinson and Ramsay 1995). Throughout most of their circumpolar range, bears are thought to gain condition during the spring and early summer when juvenile seals are abundant and relatively susceptible to predation (Stirling and Archibald 1977, Smith 1980, Hammill and Smith 1991, Stirling and Øritsland 1995, Pilfold et al. 2012). This period of hyperphagia is followed by a scarcity of food in the late summer and fall when sea ice reaches a minimum throughout the Arctic. During this season, bears in some regions are forced onto land by the melting sea ice where access to seals and other marine mammal prey is greatly reduced (Stirling et al. 1977, Derocher and Stirling 1990a,b, Ramsay et al. 1991). In other regions, bears remain on off-shore pack-ice but likely also have reduced access to and/or less success in catching seals (Amstrup et al. 2000, Stirling 2002, Atwood et al. 2015, Rode et al. 2015). Some individuals utilize terrestrial food sources during the summer and fall. However, the extent to which this occurs and the significance of terrestrial foods to energy budgets remains the subject of on-going debate and research (e.g., Derocher et al. 1993a, Hobson et al. 2009, Gormezano and Rockwell 2013, 2015, Rode et al. 2015, Tartu et al. 2016). Regardless, it is well documented that many bears especially those in the seasonal ice ecoregion like Baffin Bay (Amstrup et al. 2008) rely on nutrients and energy stored within adipose and other body tissues to meet a significant portion of their maintenance requirements for survival during this period. Consequently, body condition amongst most individuals declines progressively through the summer and fall until access to sea ice increases in the late fall and early winter (Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, Atkinson and Ramsay 1996, Derocher and Stirling 1995, Rode et al. 2011, Obbard et al. 2016). Additionally, adult females rely on body stores to support reproductive activities. Mothers with cubs continue to

lactate during the summer and fall if their condition and/ or available food is sufficient (Derocher et al. 1993b, Derocher and Stirling, 1996). Pregnant females enter dens in the fall where they rely exclusively on body stores to support gestation and early to mid-lactation over a period of 6-8 months (Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, Derocher and Stirling 1995). Given this dynamic cycle of feeding and fasting, body condition attained during the spring and early summer is expected to exert a significant influence on the survival, reproductive performance and thus status of polar bear subpopulations (Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, Derocher and Stirling 1995, 1996, Molnar et al. 2010, Molnar et al. 2011).

Tracking long-term trends in body condition has been identified as an important component of the monitoring scheme for polar bears across their circumpolar range (Vongraven et al. 2012, Patyk et al. 2015). In the absence of more intensive studies, simple body condition metrics may be useful indices for monitoring subpopulations and detecting responses to changing environmental conditions (Amstrup et al. 2006, Stirling et al. 2008a, Vongraven et al. 2012). Of particular concern, changes in body condition are predicted to be amongst the first subpopulation-level impacts of climate change evident in this species (Derocher et al. 2004, Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Wiig et al. 2008, Stirling and Derocher 2012). Indeed, declines in condition have been documented in several polar bear subpopulations in association with long-term changes in sea-ice conditions that appear to be climate induced (e.g., Stirling et al. 1999, Rode et al. 2010, Rode et al. 2014, Obbard et al. 2016). Although these trends in body condition can signal significant changes, observations of declining condition alone do not necessarily imply a decline in subpopulation status. Studies of some polar bear subpopulations have documented declines in condition in association with increases in abundance that may be the result of density dependence (Stirling et al. 1999, Rode et al. 2011, Peacock et al. 2013).

Information on body condition must therefore be interpreted alongside other measures of subpopulation performance in-order to properly assess status.

A variety of quantitative and qualitative body condition indices have been used on polar bears including body weight estimated from girth (e.g., Derocher and Stirling 1995, Rode et al. 2011), body mass indices standardized for length (e.g., Stirling et al. 1999, Cattet et al. 2002, Obbard et al. 2016), skull width (Rode et al. 2010, 2011), percent body fat determined by isotopic dilution or bioelectrical impedance analysis (Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, 1996, McKinney et al. 2014), percent lipid content of adipose tissue biopsies (Stirling et al. 2008b, McKinney et al. 2014) and a visually assigned fatness index (Amstrup et al. 2006, Stirling et al. 2008a,b). Most of these condition indices require the handling of bears to collect measurements. However, the fatness index (FI) and potentially the lipid content of adipose tissue (Pagano et al. 2014, McKinney et al. 2014) may be obtained without handling thus making them suitable for use in subpopulations monitored by less invasive methods such as aerial survey or genetic mark-recapture.

The Baffin Bay (BB) subpopulation is part of the seasonal ice-free ecoregion as defined by Amstrup et al. (2008) in which sea ice melts almost entirely in the summer and bears are forced ashore for an extended period of time, during which they have no or reduced access to food. Baffin Bay has experienced a long term reduction in sea-ice cover and a trend towards earlier spring break-up and later fall freeze-up (Laidre et al. 2015). As a result, bears are spending an increasing amount of time on land. Examining data on the morphometric measurements of BB polar bears (girth, length and skull width) for the period 1977 to 2010, Rode et al. (2011) detected a decline in body condition concurrent with declining sea-ice cover. However, geographically restricted sampling and uncertainty about trends in subpopulation density during

the latter years of this study limited the interpretation of these findings and conclusions regarding subpopulation status (York et al. 2016).

Here we summarize information on the body condition of polar bears in BB using a different measure of condition; the fatness index (FI). FI scores were collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling in Baffin Bay from 1993 to 1997 and 2011 to 2013. During the latter period of sampling bears were surveyed by genetic mark-recapture using biopsy darts. Because biopsy darted bears were not handled our collection of body condition data was limited to visually assigned FI scores only. The FI has been validated as a measure of condition in polar bears, being closely correlated with more quantitative condition indices (Stirling et al. 2008b, McKinney et al. 2014) and other biological factors (e.g., Henricksen et al. 2001, Amstrup et al. 2006). Our study examined body condition using a different index of condition collected over a different (albeit overlapping) temporal and spatial sampling frame to that of Rode et al. (2011). We examined trends in condition in relationship to sea ice. During part of this study, we also collected information on the foraging habits of BB polar bears to assess the range of food sources utilized by bears during the ice-free period. Our results provide supplementary information for interpreting the results of the recent genetic mark-recapture in BB and for understanding the present status of this subpopulation.

## **7.2. Materials and Methods**

### **Study Area**

The boundaries of the BB polar bear subpopulation (BB) encompass an area ~1 million km<sup>2</sup> in Baffin Bay, covering portions of Baffin Island and Bylot Island (66.2°N to 73.8°N) in Nunavut/Canada and parts of West and Northwest Greenland (66.0°N to 77.0°N; Taylor et al.

2005). BB is bounded by Greenland to the east, Baffin Island to the west, the North Water polynya in the north and Davis Strait to the south (Figure 7.1). Three communities in Nunavut and 37 communities in Greenland harvest bears from BB, although the majority of the Greenland harvest is taken between *ca.* 72° and 76° N. Baffin Bay is ice-covered in winter but typically ice-free in summer. During late spring and summer break-up, sea ice recedes from Greenland westward across Baffin Bay; the last remnants of ice typically occur off the coast of Baffin Island. Historically sea ice also remained in Melville Bay, NW Greenland (Born 1995). Most polar bears remain on the sea ice as it recedes and then come ashore to spend the ice-retreat period on Baffin and Bylot Islands (Taylor et al. 2005). A presumably small number of bears remain on land in northwestern Greenland throughout the ice-retreat period (Born 1995, this study).

### Field Sampling

Data for the study were collected during two periods of systematic mark-recapture sampling on Baffin Island in Baffin Bay. Sampling occurred along eastern Baffin and Bylot Islands during the ice-free season from late August to mid-October in 1993-95, 1997 and 2011-2013. Most bears in Baffin Bay move onto land on Baffin Island and Bylot in late summer as the sea ice breaks up and remain on land until freeze-up in the late fall (Taylor et al. 2005). Sampling was spatially extensive across this on-land study area during all years (Figure 7.1) although there were some noted differences in sampling strategy between the two periods (1990s and 2000s) of the study (Chapter 3).

Using helicopters we searched for bears across the study area. During the 1990s, bears were sampled by physical capture on Baffin Island and examination using methods previously

described (Taylor et al. 2005). Data on the sex, estimated age-class and reproductive status of each individual were recorded. Age of individuals was determined based on previous capture history, known (in the case of cubs and yearlings) or estimated from counts of annular rings in an extracted vestigial premolar tooth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998). Individuals were identified by means of uniquely numbered ear tags and lip tattoos. Group size, family status, location and date were also recorded.

During the 2000s, sampling occurred by remote biopsy darting (Pagano et al. 2014) and subsequent genetic analysis to determine genetic sex and identify individuals. We remotely estimated sex, age class (cub-of-the-year, yearling, subadult [ages 2 – 4], and adult) and reproductive status from the air at a range of 3-10 m above ground. Sex was later confirmed via genetic analysis. In estimating age-class and sex, the observer used multiple cues, including the size of an individual relative to its surrounding environment or accompanying bears, membership in a family group (mothers and cubs or yearlings), secondary sexual characteristics (adult males), body shape and proportions, the presence of scars (which are most often seen on adult males) and observations of urination (i.e., urine dribbling from under tail in females). Field notes also assisted in *post-hoc* reassessment of age-sex class once genetic sex was known. Age-class was later verified in some bears from previous or future captures in which an individual was captured and physically examined or where an individual was matched via DNA to membership in a known family at some past or future point. We assessed the accuracy of this system for estimating the age-class and sex of polar bears using a sample of BB bears of known age-class (Appendix B).

During both sampling periods, all encountered bears were assigned a FI score on a scale of 1-5 where 1 and 5 represent the leanest and most obese bears, respectively (Stirling et al. 2008a).

During the 1990s, this score was based on physical examination of captured bears. For bears in the 2000s, FI scores were assigned based on examination from the air at a distance of 3-7 m above ground. Additional information collected for all bears at the time of observation included the identity of the observer, date, and location (coordinates).

Additionally various sources of information including traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), expedition reports and unpublished data (Born 1995, Born et al. 2011, GINR unpublished data) indicate that small, albeit unknown, proportion of the BB subpopulation summers in the Qimmusseriarsuaq / Melville Bay area of NW Greenland rather than moving with the retreating sea ice and summering on Baffin and Bylot Islands. For comparative reasons estimates of body condition index from bears biopsy dated in NW Greenland are presented separately from that on Baffin Island. During 1-14 September 2012 and 2013 a total of 20 biopsies (2012: 6, 2013: 14) were sampled on land and along glacier fronts in the Melville Bay area using the same methods described above in Nunavut. During sampling the FI index was scored for each bear by three observers with extensive experience in judging body condition of polar bears both during examination from the air and during subsequent physical handling. The sex of all biopsied individuals was determined genetically post hoc.

### Body Condition Scoring

Bears were initially scored according to the standard FI on a scale of 1 to 5 (Stirling et al. 2008b). This scoring system was subsequently simplified to a 3 point scale of poor (FI = 1 or 2), fair (FI = 3) and good (FI = 4 or 5) condition; hereafter termed the Body Condition Score (BCS). Similar modifications of the FI for polar bears have been employed in other studies to facilitate analyses (Stirling et al. 2008a) or have been recommended for use in general monitoring



schemes for polar bears (Vongraven et al. 2012). In our case, this refinement was made in part due to the lower frequencies of bears scored as 1 and 5, but also to address concerns about potential bias. The assumption was made that a simplified scale would be subject to less bias resulting from different observers and / or distance from bear at time of scoring. Experienced observers should be able to discriminate a bear in poor, fair or good condition even at distances of up to 7 m.

Bears coming off the ice in summer are thought to be at or near their annual peak in body condition having recently gone through a period of hyperphagia when juvenile seals are relatively abundant and susceptible to predation (Stirling and Archibald 1977, Smith 1980, Hammill and Smith 1991, Stirling and Øritsland 1995, Pilfold et al. 2012). For our analyses, therefore, we calculated the proportion of bears rated as being in good condition (BCS = 3) as a metric of annual body condition within each sex and age class. Repeated observations of the same individual (as identified by physical mark or genotype) within a given year were excluded from the analyses. Observations of the same individual in different years were included. Similar to Stirling et al. (2008a), we assumed that observations of the same individual in different years were statistically independent given the dynamic nature of body condition in polar bears (Watts and Hansen 1987, Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, 1996) and its response to annual variation in environmental conditions.

### Sea-ice Metric

Based on findings from other studies (Stirling et al. 1999, Durner et al. 2004, 2006, 2009, Regehr et al. 2007, Rode et al. 2010, 2014), we hypothesized that timing of sea-ice break-up over the continental shelf (< 300m depth) of BB may influence the body condition of polar bears

during the ice-free period. We therefore calculated the annual sea-ice metric, spring transition date, as day of the year (1-365) when ice area over the continental shelf of BB reached 50% in the spring (Chapter 4). We used *Sea-ice Concentrations from Nimbus-7 SMMR and DMSP SSM/I-SSMIS Passive Microwave Data* (Cavalieri et al., 1996) available from the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) in Boulder, Co (See Laidre et al. 2015 Appendix S1 for additional details). While some researchers have used lower ice cover thresholds for studying polar bear relationships to sea ice (e.g., Cherry et al. 2013, Rode et al. 2014, Obbard et al. 2016), Laidre et al. (2015) reported that spring transition dates in Baffin Bay were not sensitive to the choice of threshold because usually the decrease of sea-ice area in the spring and the increase of sea-ice area in the fall proceed relatively quickly. A small change in the threshold results in a small change in the transition dates (Laidre et al. 2015). For sea ice in Baffin Bay, spring transition date is also correlated with other sea-ice metrics including fall transition date (negative correlation) and the interval between spring and fall transitions (Laidre et al. 2015).

We examined annual variation in our body condition metric, trends over time, and relation to spring sea-ice transition date. Similar to Rode et al. (2014), we did not include both time and sea ice in the same analyses since long term trends in our sea-ice metric were well established *a priori* (Laidre et al. 2015, Chapter 4) and these two parameters were closely correlated over the 7 years of sampling (Pearson coefficient = -0.846,  $P = 0.017$ ). Statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS package (Version 24.0, IBM Corp. 2016).

### Foraging Observations

Observations of bears feeding or evidence that they had recently fed were collected during the second sampling session, 2011-13, only. In 2011, systematic observations of the feeding

activities were not collected. In 2012 and 2013, all bears encountered were examined from the air for evidence of feeding activity. Evidence of feeding included the presence of kills and other obvious food items, fresh oil or blood staining around the mouth, pendulous/distended abdomens (full stomachs), the production of black tar-like feces during pursuit (normally seen in bears that have been eating marine mammals) and the production of feces containing visible berries.

### **7.3. Results**

#### **Body Condition Scores**

In total, 2500 polar bears were assigned a BCS during mark recapture sampling. Six bears assigned a BCS were not assigned to a sex-age class. These were excluded from the further analyses. Amongst independent bears, sample sizes were largest for adult males ( $n = 783$ ), adult females with offspring (423) and lone adult females (225). Our analyses focussed on these three groups of bears for the following reasons: (1) Sample sizes were relatively large and/or (2) the accuracy of classifying bears into sex and age class at the time of aerial observation and BCS assignment was relatively good (Appendix B)<sup>1</sup>. Amongst dependent offspring we examined BCS for cubs-of-the-year (COY) and yearlings both of which can be identified with good accuracy from the air.

During the period 1993-97, all observations were made by a single individual (Table 7.1). During the period 2011-13, observations were made by 3 individuals but a majority (79%) were made by a single individual. Of the 2496 bears in our study, four were observed by two observers in the same year. In each case the condition scores assigned by the observers were the same (adult male in poor condition, adult female in fair condition, adult female in poor condition,

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<sup>1</sup> Accuracy for adult males, adult females with offspring, lone adult females was 95%, 100% and 74%, respectively. In comparison accuracy for sub-adult males and females was <40%.

subadult female in fair condition). Because the observers collected BCS data on bears in different years and / or different parts of the study area from each other, it was not possible to distinguish observer effects from other factors.

In general, body condition was better amongst adult males and lone adult females than other age classes (Table 7.2). For example, pooling data across years, 25 and 32 % of individuals were classified as being in good condition amongst adult males and lone adult females, respectively. In contrast, amongst adult females with offspring, subadult females and subadult males, the percentage of bears in good condition was 9, 4 and 4% respectively.

There was annual variation in body condition. For example, during the period 1993-97, when all observations were collected by a single individual, the distribution of adult male BCS varied significantly from year-to-year ( $\chi^2 = 24.01$ , d.f. = 6,  $P < 0.001$ ) with more males in good condition in 1993 (58.8%) compared to other years, in particular 1997 (32.0%). Annual variation in condition was similar, although not significant, for lone adult females ( $\chi^2 = 11.51$ , d.f. = 6,  $P = 0.070$ ) and females with offspring ( $\chi^2 = 9.94$ , d.f. = 6,  $P = 0.132$ ) during this period. For the period, 2011-13, when a majority of observations were made by a single but different observer, condition was also found to vary significantly from year-to-year amongst adult males ( $\chi^2 = 24.31$ , d.f. = 4,  $P < 0.001$ ) but not lone females ( $\chi^2 = 4.89$ , d.f. = 4,  $P = 0.300$ ) or females with offspring ( $\chi^2 = 7.71$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < 0.100$ ). During this recent sampling period, 2011 tended to be a better year for body condition.

Our annual body condition metric was associated spring sea-ice transition date amongst some sex and age classes of bears (Table 7.3). The proportion of adult males assigned a BCS of 3 (good) in a given year was closely associated with the timing of spring sea-ice transition. A higher proportion of adult males were in good condition in years with a later spring transition

date (Figure 7.2a). A similar association was evident for adult females with offspring (Figure 7.2b) but not lone adult females (Figure 7.2c). These associations between condition and sea ice were also evident for adult males (Exponential curve;  $F_{1,3} = 101.27$ ,  $r^2 = 0.98$ ,  $P = 0.010$ ) and females with offspring (Exponential curve;  $F_{1,3} = 72.12$ ,  $r^2 = 0.97$ ,  $P = 0.014$ ) when analyses were limited to the period 1993 to 1997; the 4 years when data were collected by a single observer.

For COY, the proportion of bears in good condition was unrelated to the timing of spring sea-ice transition (Table 7.3). In contrast, later spring transition was associated with a higher proportion of yearlings in good condition. Similar to adult males and females with offspring, this association was also evident when analysis was limited to the period 1993-97 when analyses were limited to the period 1993 to 1997; the 4 years when data were collected by a single observer (Linear regression;  $F_{1,3} = 51.30$ ,  $r^2 = 0.96$ ,  $P = 0.019$ ).

Body condition showed a negative trend over time amongst some sex and age classes (Table 7.3). For adult males and adult females with offspring the proportion of bears in good condition during the ice-free period declined from 1993 to 2013. A similar trend, although not significant ( $P = 0.065$ ), was evident for yearlings.

In Melville Bay, NW Greenland in 2012 and 2013 the adult bears were generally in good body condition. The samples collected from this area included 10 adult females, 5 adult males, 3 subadults (1 F, 2 M) and 2 female yearlings. Three adult females and 1 adult male scored FI = 4 and 7 adult females and 4 adult males scored F = 3. Three subadults (1 F, 2 M) and 2 female yearlings all scored F = 3. Hence, although sample size in Greenland was low, BB bears in this area were in good body condition despite an on-land period which is longer than BB polar bears that summer on Baffin Island.

### Foraging During the Ice-Free period

One hundred and seven (9.3%) of the 1146 bears observed in 2012 and 2013 showed evidence of feeding. Prevalence of feeding was lowest amongst adult males (8%) and dependent offspring (7%), and highest amongst subadults (13%). Across sex and age classes, 50% of feeding observations were among adult males and subadults (Figure 7.3). The distribution of feeding observations amongst sex and age-classes did not differ significantly from the sex and age-class composition of all bears observed (feeding and not feeding); although there was a tendency for subadult bears to be over-represented amongst those observed feeding ( $\chi^2 = 5.607$ , d.f. = 4,  $P = 0.23$ ). There was no seasonal trend in prevalence of feeding observations during the sampling period (Figure 7.4).

Bears were observed feeding on a range of food items including seals (species unknown), walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*), narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*), Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), Greenland shark (*Somniosus microcephalus*) and berries (Table 7.4). Where food source was known, marine mammals comprised 47% of the observations of bears feeding. At two locations, congregations of bears were encountered along streams where char were observed to be running in large numbers. Fish carcasses found at these sites and the presence of bears standing in close quarters along these watercourses suggested bears were actively fishing. Seventeen seal kills were noted while searching for bears. Most were located along the shores of fjords rather than the main open coastline (Figure 7.5).

In Melville Bay polar bears were observed feeding on seals on patches of floes of fast ice and more or less consolidated bergy bits at glacier fronts. During September in both 2012 and 2013 numerous narwhal, ringed, bearded, harp and hooded seals were observed close to glacier

fronts and land in Melville Bay (Born et al. 2012, 2013) indicating that suitable food for BB polar bears is abundant in this area during the open-water season.

## **7.4. Discussion**

### **Body Condition of Baffin Bay Bears**

Our results demonstrate that body condition amongst BB polar bears declined over the period 1993 to 2013. The close association between condition during the ice-free period and spring sea-ice transition date is consistent with the hypothesis that reduced time on the sea ice and presumably declining access to prey during the important spring to early summer feeding period is a primary mechanism driving this decline. However, with our qualitative body condition data and simplistic analysis we have not demonstrated cause and effect. Annual variation in body condition was associated with both time (year) and spring sea-ice transition date. These two parameters are correlated with one another and may also be associated with other parameters that we did not consider. The extent to which declining condition in BB is mediated by ice conditions therefore remains uncertain.

Using body condition metrics different from those used in the present study, Rode et al. (2011) detected a decline in the condition of BB polar bears between 1990 and 2010 concurrent with declining sea-ice cover. Our findings are consistent with this earlier study except that we did not find associations between body condition and sea-ice cover amongst all sex and age classes of bears. This may be due to limitations of the qualitative condition data used in the present analyses and sample size issues. The BCS is a qualitative and thus less precise measure of condition than the quantitative metrics used by Rode et al. (2011) that were derived from morphometric measurements acquired during physical capture and handling of bears.

Additionally, during the latter years of our study (2011-2013) the BCS for each bear was assessed based on examination from a distance rather than capture and physical examination. Inaccuracies in classifying bears by age class and sex from the air, combined with a lack of direct physical handling to assess condition may have introduced more error in assigning BCS. Given these limitations, BCS data are likely a less robust and less sensitive means of detecting changes in body condition over time or in response to ecological parameters (Vongraven et al. 2012, McKinney et al. 2014). Direct, quantitative measurement of body condition by morphometry or adipose tissue lipid content (McKinney et al. 2014) remains the most reliable and precise means of monitoring condition.

Nevertheless, our study extends the findings of Rode et al. (2011) in three notable ways. First, we find that trends in body condition and the association with sea-ice conditions have continued beyond 2010. Second, Rode et al. (2011) suggest that important trends in body condition that can affect reproduction might not be detectable from on the ground observations without capture and physical measurement of bears. Our findings suggest that long-term trends in body condition can be detected without handling of bears albeit with less sensitivity. As found in other studies (Amstrup et al. 2006, Stirling et al. 2008a), visually assigned body condition scores are a useful means of monitoring body condition and polar bear responses to environmental conditions. In the absence of physical capture programs and / or more intensive monitoring schemes, the collection of condition scores provides a simple and low cost means to track general trends in BB and likely other polar bear subpopulations. Finally, York et al. (2016) maintain that the evidence linking reduced body condition to sea-ice decline in Baffin Bay (Rode et al. 2011) is ambiguous because the body condition data used in the analyses were collected in varying parts of the subpopulation area over the period of study rather than range wide



throughout. For example, during 1990s data on condition during the ice-free period were collected from bears across the subpopulation's seasonal range on eastern Baffin Island. In contrast, sampling in the 2000s was restricted to a relatively small southern portion of the range near the boundary with Davis Strait. Consequently, condition data for the 2000s may not have been representative of the subpopulation as a whole. However, sampling in our study was range wide during both time periods (1993-1997 and 2011-2013) as illustrated in Figure 7.1 suggesting that the findings of Rode et al. (2012) were representative of BB.

Several sources of bias were possible in our study. BCS data were collected by several observers in different years and different parts of the study area. Notably a single observer collected all data during the 1990s. Several different observers collected data during the 2000s and in different parts of the study area from one another. To reduce potential observer bias in assigning qualitative condition scores, we employed a simplified body condition scoring system that required observers to discriminate between bears in poor, fair and good condition. All observers in the study were experienced polar bear biologists who had previously handled hundreds or thousands of bears in varying condition and should have been capable of easily discriminating bears in good condition. However, since individual bears were not scored by more than one observer, teasing out observer effects is challenging because differences in scored condition may reflect real temporal or spatial differences in the bears sampled. Never-the-less, several lines of evidence suggest observer bias was likely not a significant factor in our study. First, a majority of observations were made by a single observer within each time period (1990s and 2000s). Differences between these two observers in scoring body condition are unlikely to explain the linear and non-linear trends in condition we observed or the close association between condition and sea ice. Additionally, the statistical significance of these associations was

maintained when analyses were restricted to a single time period when all observations were collected by a single observer. Finally, as noted by Stirling et al. (2008a) although the FI from which our condition metric was derived is a qualitative index and thus subjective, it has been found to be “*repeatable between individual biologists when blind comparisons are done in the field over both short and long time periods.*” In other studies, FI data collected by multiple observers have been found to correlate closely with quantitative indices of condition (e.g., Stirling et al. 2008b, McKinney et al. 2014). Therefore, while we cannot exclude the possibility of observer bias in our study, we suggest that this potential source of bias is unlikely to account for our results.

Body condition scores in the 1990s were collected from bears captured and physically examined. In contrast scores in the 2000s were from bears observed from the air without handling. The effect of close-up versus distance examination on the scoring of condition is unknown. McKinney et al. (2014) found that remotely assigned FI ratings did not correlate with the % lipid content of adipose tissue; another measure of condition. However, their sample sizes were small and limited to comparisons of bears of FI 3 and 4 only whereas bears in our study had FI ratings ranging from 1 to 5. Remotely scoring FI may be a less robust (precise) index of condition but is not necessarily inherently biased relative to physical examination. For many of the same reasons discussed previously concerning observer effects, we suggest that this potential source of bias is unlikely to account for our results. The use of a simplified scoring system (poor, fair, good) in our study should have helped to reduce errors in scoring for bears observed from the air. Trends in condition over time and the close association with sea-ice metrics cannot be explained by differences in examination distance.

Another source of error in our study associated with differences in sampling between the

1990s (physical capture) and 2000s (aerial observation) was in the classification of bears by sex and age-class based on aerial observation rather than handling. Classifying bears from the air is without doubt less accurate than physical examination. However, aerial classification is accurate in most instances (Appendix B), especially amongst adult males and adult females with offspring; the two classes exhibiting the strongest trends in condition in our study. Additionally, despite being less precise we have no evidence to suggest that aerial classification results in a bias in age and sex classifications amongst a group of bears. This source of measurement error thus seems unlikely to account for our results.

An assumption of our study was that bears sampled within our study area were representative of the BB subpopulation. Although sampling during both the 1990s and 2000s was extensive across the seasonal range of BB bears, the proportion of bears in the subpopulation exposed to sampling may have differed between these two periods (Chapter 3). In the 1990s, a high proportion of collared bears did not come ashore on Baffin Island during the sampling windows but instead remained on remnant offshore sea ice where they could not be sampled. This observation suggests that a significant portion of the subpopulation was not sampled in the 1990s. Whether this biased our estimates of body condition is unknown. However, we note that bears remaining out on the ice were likely still able to hunt seals to some extent and may therefore have been in better condition than those coming ashore. Consequently, any bias in our sampling would have resulted in underestimation of condition in the 1990s or in years when spring transition occurred later. This would therefore not account for the trends in condition we observed over time or in association with date of spring sea-ice transition.

Relative to the 2000s, sampling in the 1990s was also more concentrated near the coast with less inland sampling (Chapter 3). Similar to other seasonally ice-free subpopulations (e.g.,

Derocher and Stirling 1990) polar bears in Baffin Bay are known to exhibit a degree of spatial segregation by sex, age class and reproductive status with respect to the use of terrestrial habitat during the ice-free period (Ferguson et al. 1997, Chapter 4). Adult females with cubs tend to select fjords and avoid offshore islands and coastal regions where densities of adult males are higher. Pregnant bears select inland and upland denning habitats. While limited inland sampling in the 1990s may have resulted in under sampling of certain sex, age and reproductive classes we are unaware of any evidence to suggest that this would also have biased body condition data. However, to explore the potential impact of this difference in sampling between epochs on the body condition data, we estimated and delineated the minimum extent of the sampling frame from the 1990s using capture locations in a GIS. We subset the 2000s data using this layer to create a dataset collected over the same sampling area in both time periods and repeated our analyses of trends in body condition. The results were essentially the same (Appendix C), suggesting that this sampling difference between epochs did not influence our findings.

Bears in BB lose condition through the summer and fall while on land in BB (Rode et al. 2011). Differences amongst years in the timing of sampling could therefore have affected our annual body condition metric. Sampling occurred between late August and late October but varied somewhat in timing from year-to-year. We did not consider timing of sampling in our analysis. During preliminary exploration of the data we noted that the 3 years where the median date (Julian day) of sampling was earliest were the best (1993) and two worst (2012 and 2013) years for body condition amongst both adult males and adult females with offspring, as measured by our metric. Median date of sampling was also not associated with our condition metric for any of the sex and age classes of bears. Similarly, looking at the number of days between spring transition date and the date of sampling for each bear as an index of timing of sampling relative

to seas-ice breakup we found similar results suggesting that timing of sampling did not account for the annual variation in body condition that we were observing at a broad scale with our somewhat crude measure of condition. However, we acknowledge that a more sophisticated analysis such as a polynomial logistic regression could incorporate sampling date as a covariate.

Declining body condition and reproduction are amongst the first subpopulation level effects predicted occur in polar bears as a result of climate change (Derocher et al. 2004, Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Molnar et al. 2011, Stirling and Derocher 2012). Our evidence of a decline in condition in BB from 1993 to 2013, along with similar findings from a previous study (Rode et al. 2011), is accompanied by evidence of a concurrent decline in reproduction in this subpopulation. These findings are also consistent with available traditional knowledge suggesting that body condition of polar bears in BB was poorer in the early 2000s relative to the 1990s (Dowsley and Wenzel 2008, Born et al. 2011). These changes may signal a reduction in the carrying capacity of BB.

The bears that were biopsied in Melville Bay in September 2012 and 2013 generally appeared to be in good body condition. However, during an interview survey among experienced polar bear hunters in NW Greenland ca. 24% of the 72 interviewees noted that polar bears had generally become thinner (Born et al. 2011).

Similar to recent observations in the Davis Strait subpopulation (Rode et al. 2011, Peacock et al. 2013) we cannot rule-out possible density effects on body condition and reproduction resulting from a declining sea-ice platform. Regardless of whether density effects are at play, if the observed association between sea ice and body condition is real and the well documented trend in sea ice continues it is reasonable to expect that this subpopulation will experience an on-going decline in condition as a result of declining habitat (Laidre et al. 2015). This in turn is

predicted to lead to demographic consequences including reduced adult survival (Molnar et al. 2010, 2011).

Measures of body condition have been identified as one of the most important metrics needed to evaluate polar bear health (Patyk et al. 2015). Similar to previous studies (e.g., Amstrup et al. 2006, Stirling et al. 2008a,b, McKinney et al. 2014) we have demonstrated the utility of a simple qualitative metric for monitoring trends in body condition in polar bear subpopulations where more detailed quantitative measures of condition may not be available. In circumstances where demographic studies are conducted periodically rather than on an on-going basis or where the selected methods of survey do not involve capture and handling, collection of visually assigned body condition scores from harvested bears or from opportunistic observations of free ranging animals offers a useful means of surveillance. Such surveillance may be carried out by government agencies but there is also potential for implementation as part of a community-based ecosystem monitoring scheme. Changes in condition detected through this method of monitoring may serve as a trigger to initiate more intensive studies.

We acknowledge that results from analyses of FI scores, including those of the present study, must be interpreted cautiously given the many potential biases associated with this type of data. While many of these potential biases can be mitigated through study design and analyses, further work is needed to examine the robustness of these data before this method of monitoring is implemented more widely in government or community-based monitoring schemes.

#### Foraging During the Ice-Free period

Polar bears have been found to opportunistically exploit a wide variety of food sources while on land during the summer and fall (e.g., Derocher et al. 1993a, Brook and Richardson

2002, Dyck and Romberg 2007, Gormenzano and Rockwell 2013, Iverson et al. 2014, Rogers et al. 2015, Tartu et al. 2016). Most of these foods are terrestrial in origin including berries, bird eggs, birds, small mammals and occasionally large mammal prey such as caribou or reindeer. Although bears have been observed catching fish (Dyck and Romberg 2007) and seals in open water (Furnell and Oolooyuk 1980), and scavenging the bone piles of human hunted bowhead whales (Rogers et al. 2015), the available evidence suggests marine mammals generally represent a small portion of the diet during this period of minimum sea ice. In Western Hudson Bay, for example, Gormenzo et al. (2013) found evidence of marine mammal remains in less than 5% of polar bear fecal samples collected during the on-land period. In contrast, terrestrial foods such as vegetation and eggs made up the majority of material in these samples. Similar dietary habits have been documented in Southern Hudson Bay (Russell 1975)<sup>2</sup>.

In Baffin Bay we found evidence of recent foraging in approximately 9% of the bears observed during the on-land period. The type of food consumed was known for approximately half of these individuals. Marine mammals, in particular seals and walrus made up almost half of the identifiable food sources. While these are opportunistic observations and therefore subject to numerous potential biases, these findings suggest that bears in Baffin Bay may make greater use of marine mammals during the ice-free period than bears in some other subpopulations. This may be the result of differences in habitat and / or the availability of marine mammal prey. In contrast to the lowlands of the Hudson and James Bays, the east coast of Baffin Island is characterized by rugged coastline with high mountains, long, deep fjords and glaciers some of which run directly into the marine environment. Of the seal kills documented during our study most were located along the shores of fjords rather than the main open coastline (Figure 7.5). As suggested by Derocher et al. (2004) fjords may offer preferred seal hunting habitat for polar

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<sup>2</sup> Russell (1975) found seal remains in 9% of polar bear scats collected on-land during the summer.

bears for several reasons. Stable sea ice at tide water glaciers provides prime breeding habitat for ringed seals (Lydersen et al. 2014). Additionally, remnant sea ice that persists longer into the summer, the shedding of ice from glaciers, the early formation of new sea ice around freshwater outflows and the availability of Arctic char and other food sources near the mouths of rivers may make fjords good habitat for seals. These same features may also make fjords good polar bear habitat. Stable and persistent ice provides a platform to hunt from and the steep sides of fjords give polar bears easy access to the deeper waters in which seals may be swimming during the open water period.

In Melville Bay polar bears were observed in September near or at glacier fronts where numerous ringed seals were also observed (Born et al. 2012, 2013). Satellite telemetry has shown that some bears remain in this habitat throughout the year for several years (Chapter 2). Hence, clearly some bears are able to sustain year round on prey (likely mainly ringed seals) taken in this type of habitat.

We observed a number of bears that appeared to be feeding on anadromous Arctic char during their seasonal runs into creeks and lakes. Observations of polar bears feeding on Arctic char have been previously reported (Dyck and Romberg 2007, Dyck and Kebreab 2009) and traditional knowledge of certain Arctic char runs that are visited annually by polar bears is present amongst residents of Nunavut (S. Atkinson pers. comm.). In Baffin Bay, the significance of Arctic char to polar bear nutritional budgets is unknown. However, we note there are numerous char runs and the available biomass is potentially high. While this food source is only available during a short seasonal window in late summer, the timing and location of char runs is highly predictable. This makes it a reliable source of food for some bears (at least locally) during the ice-free period when other foods are scarce. In some grizzly bear populations, access



to anadromous fish has been shown to directly affect body mass, litter size and population density (Hildebrand et al. 1999, 2004). Whether Arctic char hold similar significance for polar bears is unknown but is worthy of further investigation. Based on energetics modelling, Dyck and Kebreab (2009) speculated that polar bears with access to char could in theory maintain or gain body weight during the ice-free period. In contrast, Rode et al. (2010b) suggested that the use of char by polar bears was limited by the availability of suitable water bodies (creeks and rivers) in which bears could capture anadromous fish with an energetic efficiency high enough to permit maintenance or gains in weight. To date, however, there have been no direct empirical studies of the significance of Arctic char in the diets and energetics of polar bears. Arctic char have not been included in prey models for quantitative free fatty acid signature analysis (QFFASA) studies of polar bear diet (e.g., Thiemann et al. 2008, 2009, Galicia et al. 2015). Consequently, this prey's signature would not have been detected in dietary studies conducted to date. We suggest that QFFASA models of polar bear diets should be calibrated to include the signatures of Arctic char sampled from the same regions as the polar bears being studied.

Sea-ice conditions are changing in Baffin Bay (Laidre et al. 2015, Chapter 4). Studies suggest this is affecting the movements and distribution (Chapter 2), habitat use (Chapter 4), body condition (Rode et al. 2011, this study) and reproductive performance (Chapter 6) of polar bears in the region. Declining condition and reproduction is presumably mediated by reduced per capita food intake but precisely how availability of food for polar bears is changing is unknown in part due to lack of knowledge about trends in marine mammal populations (Laidre et al. 2015). Changes in prey abundance and vulnerability to predation are both potential mechanisms. Changes in prey diversity are also possible. One such change may be increased access to sub-Arctic seals such as harp seals (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*). Baffin Bay is part of

the summer range of the western north Atlantic harp seal population. The near 2.5 fold increase in this seal population over the last 30 decades is one of the mechanisms postulated to have supported an increase in polar bear abundance in the neighbouring Davis Strait (DS) subpopulation (Peacock et al. 2013). Similarly, McKinney et al. (2013) attributed improving body condition (expressed as adipose tissue lipid content) amongst polar bears in East Greenland (EG) to increased access to sub-Arctic seals including harp seals. Unlike DS and EG, however, bears in BB do not have access to harp seal whelping areas and are therefore not able to access this prey species during its most vulnerable season. For bears in BB, hunting of harp seals is limited to late spring through to fall when predation success rates amongst polar bears hunting in low ice cover or open water are likely relatively low. Polar bears in Svalbard are known to prey on harp seals in the summer (Derocher et al. 2002). Bears in BB may have similar summer foraging opportunities. Indeed, using QFFASA, Galicia et al. (2015) found that adult male polar bears from BB had a higher proportion of harp seal in their diet relative to bears from other subpopulations. This suggests that polar bears in BB have been able to benefit to some extent from the availability of this species. However, the observation that body condition amongst BB bears has declined over the last 3 decades suggests that any shift in prey availability associated with harp seal population expansion has not offset the effects of declining sea-ice conditions on access to other food sources.

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**Table 7.1.** Frequency of observations for body condition scores of polar bears in Baffin Bay.

Proportion of within-year observations in parentheses.

Year	Observer				Total
	1	2	3	4	
1993	-	-	-	149 (1.0)	149
1994	-	-	-	220 (1.0)	220
1995	-	-	-	243 (1.0)	243
1997	-	-	-	285 (1.0)	285
2011	31 (0.06)	415 (0.87)	36 (0.07)	-	482
2012	-	529 (0.79)	142 (0.21)	-	671
2013	-	316 (0.70)	134 (0.30)	-	450
Total	31	1260	312	897	2500

**Table 7.2.** Frequency of body condition scores (BCS) assigned to polar bears on Baffin Island.

BCS scores were derived from Fatness Index (FI) scores (1-5) assigned to polar bears during field observations (following Stirling et al. 2008b). FI scores of 1-2, 3 and 4-5 were assigned BCS of poor, fair and good respectively.

Sex-Age Class			BCS			Total
			Poor	Fair	Good	
Adult Male	Year	1993	7	13	30	51
		1994	14	30	27	71
		1995	21	28	31	80
		1997	13	72	40	125
		2011	16	88	35	139
		2012	52	123	21	196
		2013	23	86	12	121
Total		133	440	185	783	
Adult Female (Lone)	Year	1993	2	2	6	10
		1994	3	6	3	12
		1995	0	4	2	6
		1997	2	20	5	27
		2011	3	26	14	43
		2012	8	44	19	72
		2013	5	26	24	55
Total		21	128	61	225	
Adult Female (w/offspring)	Year	1993	4	13	8	25
		1994	15	19	6	40
		1995	15	22	5	42
		1997	11	24	3	38
		2011	7	75	9	91
		2012	18	91	3	112
		2013	8	63	4	75
Total		76	307	38	423	
Subadult Female	Year	1993	3	7	2	12
		1994	6	6	0	12
		1995	4	14	0	18
		1997	4	10	1	15
		2011	3	31	3	37
		2012	13	62	0	75

		2013	4	35	3	42
	Total		36	165	9	211
Subadult Male	Year	1993	1	7	1	9
		1994	4	11	1	16
		1995	14	13	2	27
		1997	8	9	0	17
		2011	4	19	1	24
		2012	8	45	1	54
		2013	8	27	1	36
	Total		40	131	7	183
COY	Year	1993	2	22	2	26
		1994	16	28	0	44
		1995	15	15	4	34
		1997	22	19	0	41
		2011	4	80	12	96
		2012	8	85	1	94
		2013	5	64	8	77
	Total		67	313	25	412
Yearling	Year	1993	1	8	6	15
		1994	3	16	6	25
		1995	7	18	5	30
		1997	3	18	1	22
		2011	0	43	5	48
		2012	5	51	1	57
		2013	5	35	2	42
	Total		24	190	25	239
2-Year-Olds	Year	1993	0	1	0	1
		1995	2	3	1	6
		2011	2	0	0	2
		2012	0	8	1	9
	Total		4	12	1	18
Total	Year	1993	18	73	51	149
		1994	59	116	37	220
		1995	71	117	45	243
		1997	60	172	48	285
		2011	38	362	76	480
		2012	100	510	41	669
		2013	55	336	53	448
	Total <sup>1</sup>		401	1686	351	2494

<sup>1</sup> Excludes 6 bears of unrecorded sex-age class

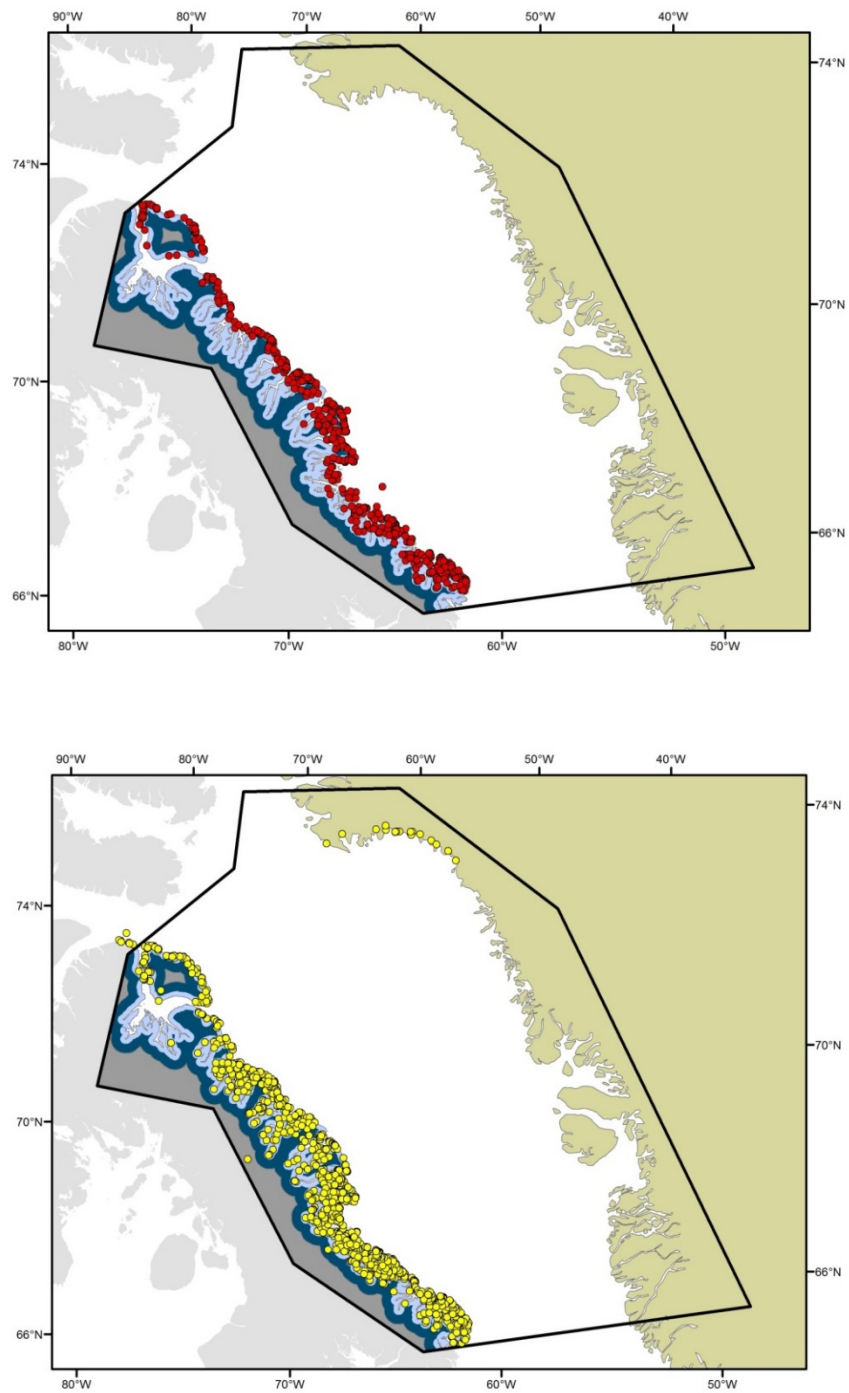
**Table 7.3.** Regression results for an annual body condition metric for polar bears on Baffin Island. The metric, proportion of bears in good condition, was derived from observed frequencies of Fatness Index (FI) scores ranging from 1 to 5 (Stirling et al. 2008). Bears of FI 4 or 5 were in good condition. Spring ice transition was the decimal day (1-365) when ice cover over the continental shelf of BB reached 50%. Regressions were performed in the Curve Estimation procedure of SPSS (Version 24.0).

<b>Sex-Age Class</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b><math>F_6</math></b>	<b><math>r^2</math></b>	<b><math>P</math></b>	<b>Curve Type</b>
Adult Male	Spring Ice Transition	102.99	0.98	$\leq \mathbf{0.001}$	Quadratic (2 <sup>nd</sup> order)
Adult Male	Year	18.50	0.79	<b>0.008</b>	Linear
Adult Female (alone)	Spring Ice Transition	0.65	0.12	0.456	Linear
Adult Female (alone)	Year	0.03	0.01	0.863	Linear
Adult Female (with offspring)	Spring Ice Transition	53.29	0.91	<b>0.001</b>	Exponential
Adult Female (with offspring)	Year	7.31	0.59	<b>0.043</b>	Exponential
Yearling	Spring Ice Transition	21.57	0.81	<b>0.006</b>	Exponential
Yearling	Year	5.526	0.53	0.065	Exponential
COY	Spring Ice Transition	0.10	0.02	0.760	Linear
COY	Year	0.334	0.06	0.587	Linear

**Table 7.4.** Food sources used by bears on Baffin Island during Aug to Oct, 2012 and 2013.

<b>Food Source</b>	<b>Number of Bears Observed</b>
Berries	10
Arctic Char	14
Walrus	10
Seal	11
Narwhal	1
Greenland Shark	1
Unknown	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>

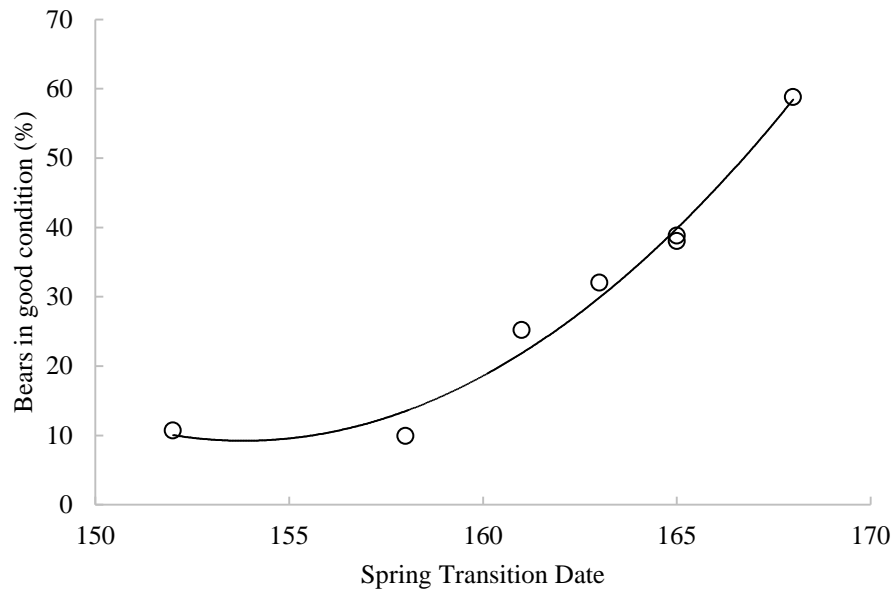




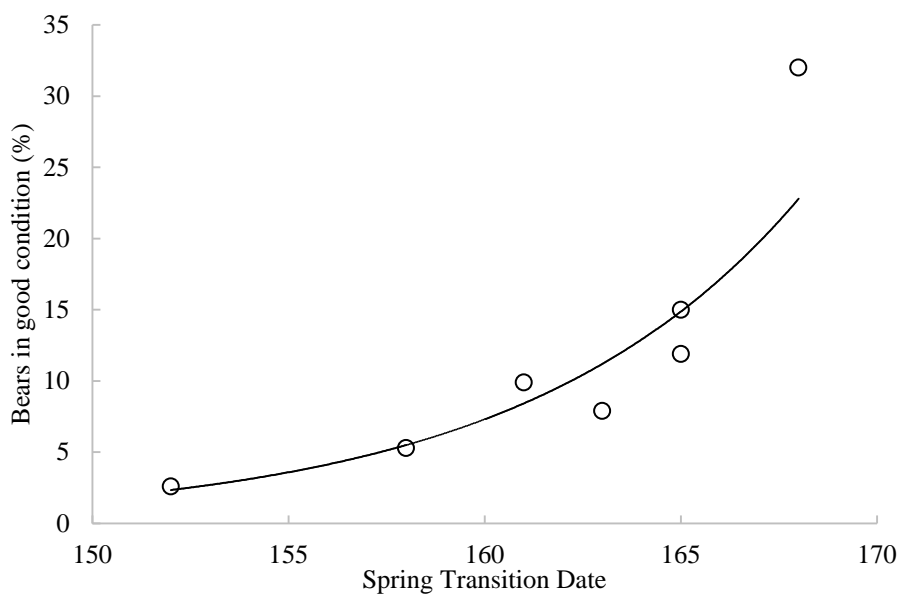
**Figure 7.1.** Spatial distribution of live captures recorded during sampling in the western parts of the range of the Baffin Bay polar bear subpopulation, 1993 – 1995, 1997 (top), and 2011 – 2013

(bottom). Red, 1990s. Yellow, 2010s. During both periods polar bears were also live captured in the eastern parts (i.e., the Melville Bay area) of the subpopulation's range (data not shown).

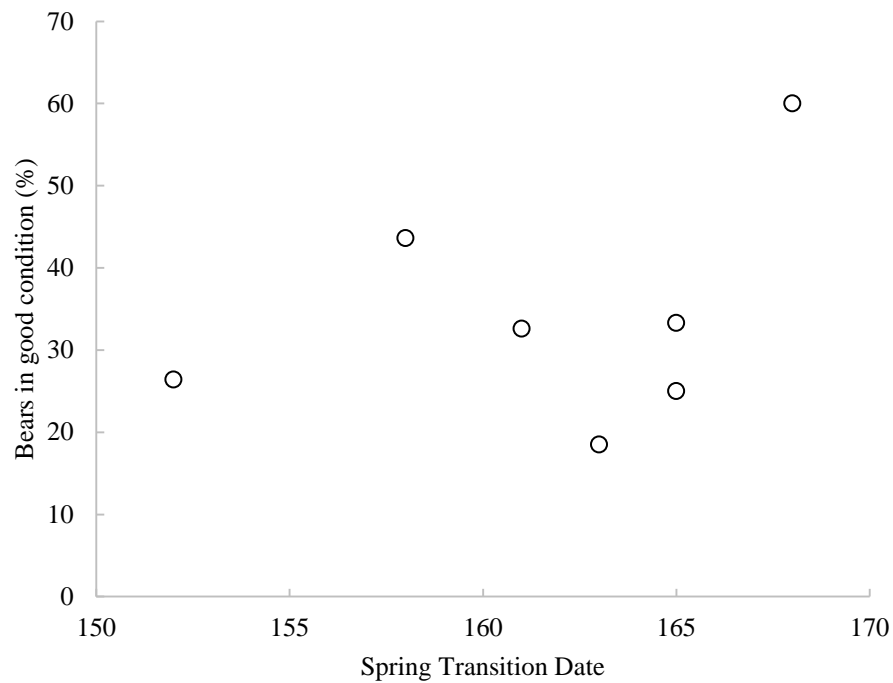
(a)



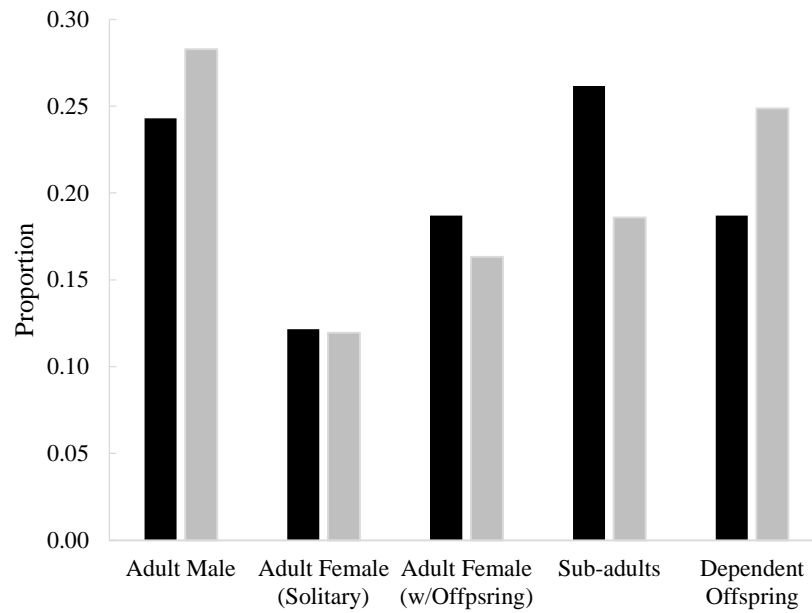
(b)



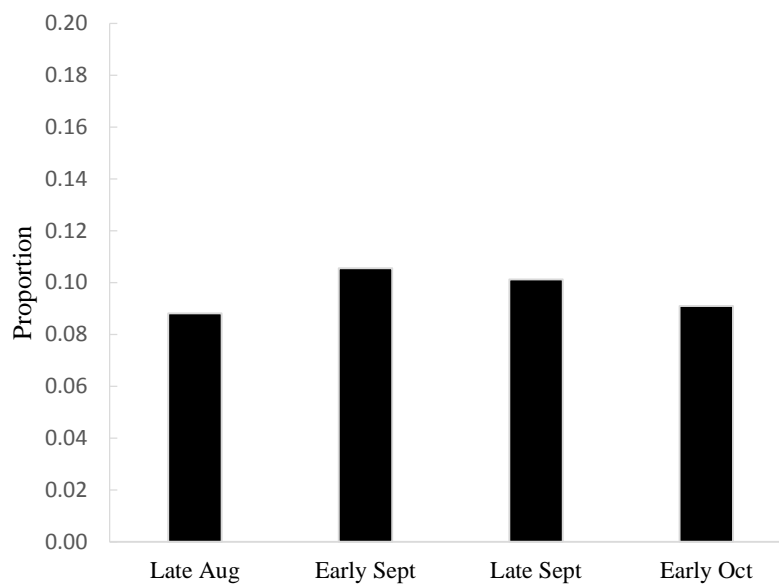
(c)



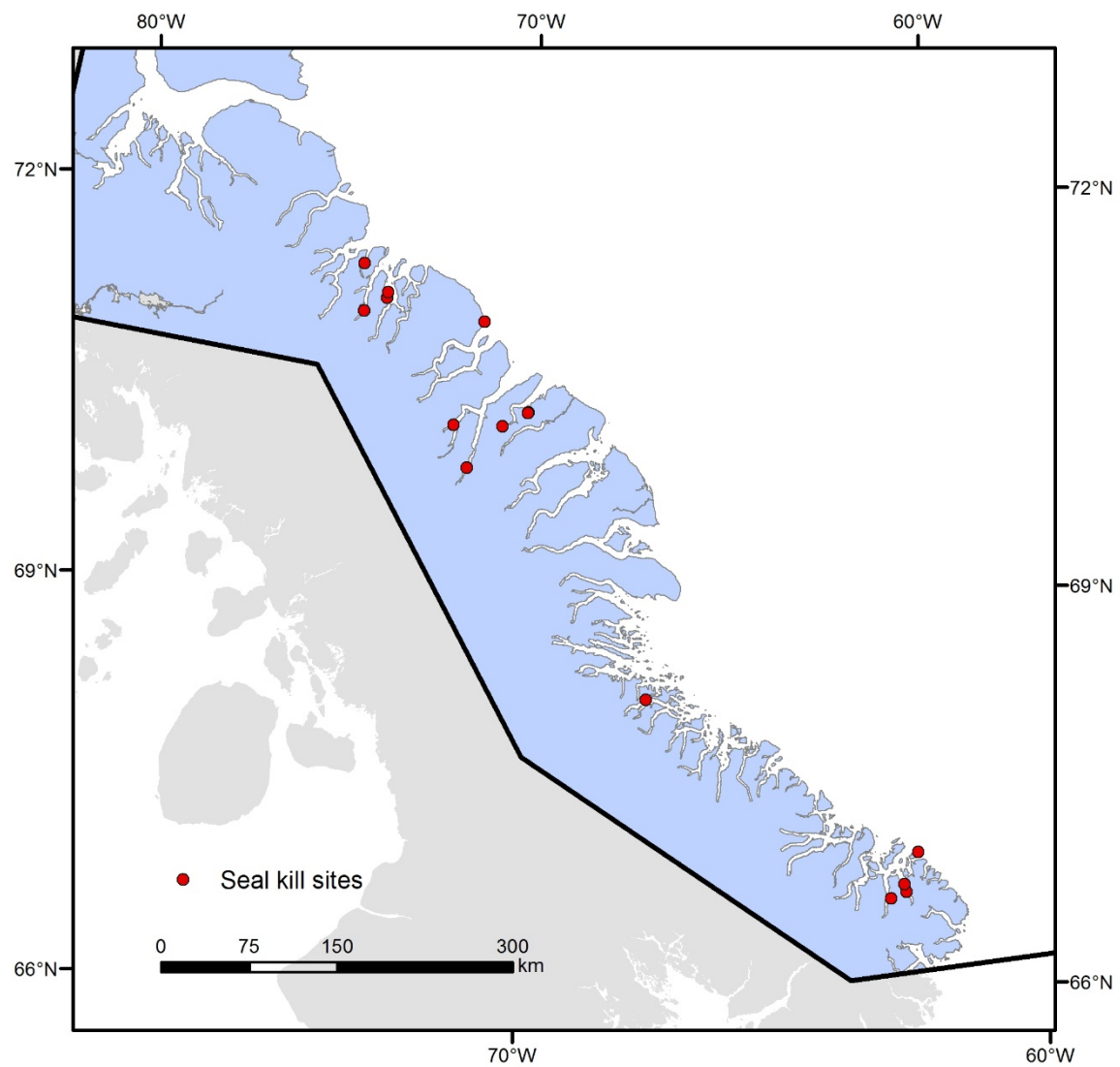
**Figure 7.2.** The association between the percent of bears in good body condition in western Baffin Bay and the timing of spring sea-ice transition date for (a) adult males, (b) adult females with dependent offspring and (c) lone adult females.



**Figure 7.3.** The sex and age class distribution of polar bears showing evidence of recent feeding (black) as compared to all the bears observed (grey) on Baffin Island in Baffin Bay during August-October, 2012 and 2013.



**Figure 7.4.** Prevalence of feeding evidence amongst bears on Baffin Island in Baffin Bay, 2012 and 2013. Data presented bimonthly.



**Figure 7.5.** Distribution of seal kill sites observed during polar bear biopsy darting along eastern Baffin Island, Aug-Oct 2011-13.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **POLAR BEAR HARVESTING IN BAFFIN BAY AND KANE BASIN: A SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL HARVEST AND HARVEST REPORTING, 1993 TO 2014**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

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- Both Canada (Nunavut) and Greenland harvest from the shared subpopulations of polar bears in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin.
  - During 1993-2005 (i.e., before quotas were introduced in Greenland) the combined annual harvest averaged 165 polar bears (range: 120-268) from the Baffin Bay subpopulation and 12 polar bears (range: 6-26) from Kane Basin (for several of the years, harvest reported from Kane Basin was based on an estimate).
  - During 2006-2014 the combined annual harvest averaged 161 (range: 138-176) from Baffin Bay and 6 (range: 3-9) polar bears from Kane Basin.
  - Total harvest peaked between 2002 and 2005 coinciding with several events in harvest reporting and harvest management in both Canada and Greenland.
  - In Baffin Bay the sex ratio of the combined harvest has remained around 2:1 (male: females) with an annual mean of 35% females amongst independent bears.
  - In Kane Basin the sex composition of the combined harvest was 33% females overall for the period 1993-2014. The estimated composition of the harvest since the introduction of a quota in Greenland is 44% female but the factual basis for estimation of the sex ratio in the harvest is weak.
  - In Greenland the vast majority of bears are harvested between January and June in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin whereas in Nunavut *ca.* 40% of the harvest in Baffin Bay is in the summer to fall (August – November) while bears are on or near shore. In Nunavut, all bears harvested from Kane Basin occurred in the spring.
  - Sport hunting of polar bears is permitted in Canada but not Greenland. Sport hunting activity average 16% of annual harvest and peaked in 2008 coincident with several management actions. This type of hunting is highly selective for older, adult males.
  - Defense-of-life-and-property kills (DLPs) of polar bears in Baffin Bay was highly selective for young (2-3 years old) individuals. We did not find evidence of a trend in the annual number of DLPs between 1993 and 2014. Most DLPs occur during the open water
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period (August-November) when bears are on or near shore. The seasonal frequencies of DLPs in Canada (Nunavut) declined through the summer and fall.

- Genetic validation of the sex of individual bears as reported by the hunters showed that the gender of harvested bears was incorrectly reported in a significant number of cases. Inaccuracies in gender reporting were greatest in Greenland.
  - Based on genetic validation, the presence of physical marks (i.e., ear tags or tattoos) on bears was under reported in the harvest. Detection of marked bears declined with increasing age of marks suggesting that mark loss (especially loss of ear tags) was a problem. This finding has implications for the use of harvest recoveries in MR recapture studies.
  - Management and the history of management of polar bears in Canada and Greenland differs in some respects: (1) quotas were introduced in Canada in 1967 and in Greenland in 2006, (2) sport hunting is allowed in Canada but not permitted in Greenland, (3) Canadian management is designed to achieve a target harvest sex ration of 2:1 (males to females) whereas the harvest of independent polar bears in GL is non-selective, (4) the vast majority of polar bears in Greenland are taken from dog sleds whereas in Canada the vast majority are taken from snowmobiles.
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## 8.1. Introduction

Climate induced loss of sea-ice habitat has been identified as the ultimate threat to the persistence of polar bears across their circumpolar range (PBSG 2010; Wiig et al. 2015). Other threats to the species, including pollution, industrial development, tourism and over-harvest are considered to be of varying importance amongst the different subpopulations. Three of the 19 recognized subpopulations of polar bears are currently designated as declining by the IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group (<http://pbsg.npolar.no/en/index.html>). Of these three (Southern Beaufort Sea, Baffin Bay and Kane Basin), potential over-harvest has been identified as a concern in Baffin Bay (BB) and Kane Basin (KB).

Based on a mark-recapture study, Taylor et al. (2005) estimated the number of polar bears in BB at 2,074 (95% CI: 1544-2604) in 1998. A subsequent population viability analysis (PVA) using the 1998 abundance estimate, associated vital rates and available harvest data projected a decline to 1,564 bears (95% CI: 690-2402) in 2004 (PBSG 2010). Importantly, these

simulations suggested that the combined harvest of bears from BB within Canada and Greenland was unsustainable. Furthermore, this PVA did not take into account on-going sea-ice habitat loss which was predicted to exacerbate the potential impacts of the harvest. In contrast to these scientific findings traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of polar bears in BB does not suggest this subpopulation is presently declining in response to harvest and / or sea ice (Dowsley and Wenzel 2008, Born et al. 2011). York et al. (2016) have postulated that this disparity between science and TEK may be the result of inaccuracies in the scientific data for BB. In particular, potential under reporting of tagged bears in the harvest and / or over reporting of total harvest in Greenland (both under and over reporting of the harvest may result in bias in mark-recapture estimates of abundance and survival rates). However, the validity of these assertions regarding harvest reporting is unproven.

Based on a mark-recapture study, the size of the KB subpopulation was estimated to be 164 (95% CI: 94-234) polar bears for 1994 - 1997 (Taylor et al. 2008a). Taylor et al. (2008a) also suggested that Kane Basin might act as a sink (i.e., some bears may move from Baffin Bay into Kane Basin) because of unsustainable rates of harvest in KB (ibid.), and lack of genetic differentiation from Baffin Bay (Paetkau et al. 1999). Using the abundance and vital rates estimated from the 1994-97 capture study and catches reported from Nunavut and Greenland, 100% of the PVA simulations resulted in a decline in this subpopulation size after 10 years (PBSG 2010). Similar to BB, this simulated decline in subpopulation size as a result of harvest did not take into account changes in sea-ice habitat. York et al. (2016) postulated that the available TEK for KB, although limited, did not appear to contradict these scientific findings. However, neither of the sources cited by York et al. (2016) – i.e., COSEWIC (2008) and M.K. Taylor (pers. comm. 1986-2008) - bring any documentation for this statement. In contrast, a

detailed study involving the interviewing of Greenland hunters with extensive experience hunting polar bears in the Kane Basin region documented the TEK perception that the occurrence of polar bear in KB has increased (Born et al. 2011).

In response to concerns regarding the projected declines in abundance, the impacts of harvest, on-going sea-ice habitat loss and the apparent disparity between scientific findings and TEK, Canada and Greenland jointly initiated new mark-recapture surveys of the BB and KB subpopulations from 2011-2014. Results from these surveys are presented elsewhere in this report (Chapters 5 and 10). Here we summarize available polar bear harvest information for BB and KB for the period 1993 to 2014; the period spanning both the recent and previous surveys in these subpopulations. Furthermore, a new system of reporting the catch of polar bears was introduced in Greenland in 1993. The objectives of this summary are to provide background information for discussion around future harvest levels and subpopulation status in light of results from the new surveys. We examine the level and composition of the harvest looking for trends over time or in relation to other factors. We also examine the harvest monitoring systems to identify issues that may affect the accuracy of harvest monitoring and the ability of jurisdictions to effectively manage harvest. Finally we make recommendations on improvements to the harvest reporting/monitoring systems.

Both BB and KB are jointly managed by Canada (Nunavut) and Greenland. Systems of harvest management and monitoring differ substantially between these two jurisdictions. Detailed descriptions of the respective systems and relevant history are presented in Appendix D. This information constitutes an important reference for the results presented herein.

## **8.2. Methods**

### Canadian Harvest Data

Data on polar bears harvested from BB and KB within Canada (Nunavut) were obtained from the Government of Nunavut's (GN) polar bear harvest database. This database contains records for all bears reported to have been harvested from these subpopulations. The methods of data collection are described elsewhere (Appendix D). From this database we extracted records for bears harvested from Jul 1, 1992 to Jun 30, 2014. The regulatory season for polar bear hunting in Canada (Nunavut) is from July 1 to June 30 the following year. This differs from Greenland where the regulatory season for polar bear hunting is from Jan 1 to Dec 31. Because adjustments in Total Allowable Harvest (quota) are made on a seasonal basis in response to recorded harvest levels in the preceding season, harvest figures were reported by season rather than by calendar year. For example, we used the notation 1992/93 when reporting harvest figures for the season beginning Jul 1, 1992 and ending Jun 30, 1993.

The extracted data included the sex, age class (adult, sub adult, 2-year-olds, yearling and cub-of-the-year [COY]), age (years), date, location and type of harvest for each individual. In reporting total harvest levels we considered all forms of human-caused mortality including illegal harvest and accidental kills but excluded bears killed for humane reasons (i.e., diseased or dying from natural causes). Other analyses were limited to the three main types of harvesting: Regular (subsistence) hunts, sport hunts and the harvest of bears in Defense-Life-and-Property (DLPs). We examined harvest by time (year or season), sex, type, monthly distribution and age. Although known for most individuals, records where sex, age class or date of harvest was unknown were excluded from the corresponding analyses where those parameters were used. Individual ages (years) based on ageing of harvested bears were only available up to June 2010 limiting our analyses of age of harvest to the period 1992/93 – 2009/10.

For DLPs we also examined the relationship with several annual metrics of sea ice to test the hypothesis that the number of human-bear conflicts, hence DLPs, increases in years when sea-ice breaks up earlier and/or forms later thereby forcing bears to remain on land for longer periods without access to their marine mammal prey (Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Stirling and Derocher 2012). As an index of the timing of spring sea-ice break-up, spring transition date was calculated as the date (Julian day) that spring sea-ice cover reached 50% over the continental shelf of BB. As an index of the timing of sea-ice formation in the fall, fall transition was calculated as the date (Julian day) that fall sea-ice cover reached 50% over the continental shelf of BB. The difference between spring and fall transition dates was used as an index for the length of the ice-free season. Additional details of these sea-ice metrics are provided in Chapter 4.

#### Greenlandic Harvest Data

*Magnitude of the Annual Catch from KB and BB* – For the period, 1993-2005 (i.e., prior to the introduction of quotas in 2006), data on the Greenland annual catch of polar bears from the KB and BB subpopulations were based on the “Piniarneq” reporting-system (for a description of this system see Appendix D). Information on catches reported via this system is compiled annually and published by the Greenland Government’s Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture (DFHA) in Nuuk. However, after the introduction of quotas when the polar bear harvest was more closely monitored detailed information on every kill was collected and compiled by the DFHA. Data for this report on the total annual kill of polar bears in 1993-2005 and in 2006-2014 were provided by the DFHA (*in litt.* August 2015)

*Seasons of Catch* – Information on date (day/month/year) of each polar bear catch was provided by the DFHA (*in litt.* 2014, 2015). This information was used to describe the seasonal

distribution of the Greenland catch of polar bears from the KB and the BB subpopulations during 2006-2014.

*Means of Transportation When Hunting Polar Bears* – For each bear caught, hunters reported the type of vehicle used during the hunt (i.e., dog sled, skiff or boat; or a combination of these means of transportation). The terms “skiff” describes a boat up to 20 feet in length and usually powered with an outboard engine. Boats larger than 20 BRT/15 BT must not be used during polar bear hunts or for transportation to or from polar bear hunting grounds (Anon. 2005). These boats are small-type fishing vessel made of wood, fiber glass or steel with an inboard engine.

The information reported during 2006-2014 on vehicles used during 445 individual polar bear hunts from the KB and BB subpopulations was used to describe hunting methods both overall and regionally. Due to differences hunting traditions not at least related to stability and duration of the sea-ice cover and therefore distribution of polar bears there are regional variations in hunting methods from north to south in NW and W Greenland (*cf.* also Born et al. 2011). The NW and W coast of Greenland between Kane Basin and the town of Sisimiut was therefore subdivided into six areas: (1) Subarea 1 compasses the area to the north of Ullersuaq/Kap Alexander - 78° 10' N (i.e., Kane Basin), (2) subarea 2 consists of the area between Ullersuaq and Innaaganeq/Kap York (76° 30' N), (3) subarea 3 encompasses the areas between Innaaganeq/Kap York and the peninsula Nuussuaq/Kraulshavn at *ca.* 74° N (i.e., the Melville Bay area), (4) subarea 4 comprises the southern Upernavik area between 74° N and the peninsula Sigguk at 71° 30' N, subarea 5 is the areas between Sigguk and the town of Aasiaat at 68° 45' N (i.e., the Uummannaq, Disko Island and Disko Bay area), and subarea 6 comprises the area between Aasiaat and Sisimiut at *ca.* 66° 55' N.

*Sex and Age Composition of the Catch* – Before the introduction of quotas information on the sex and age composition of the catch from KB and BB was obtained during interview surveys (Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990, Rosing-Asvid 2002, Born et al. 2011), and few biological samples (Rosing-Asvid 2002). Information on sex and age composition (i.e., independent males and females and dependent cubs) was extracted from these sources.

During an interview survey among experienced polar bear hunters in 2006 in NW Greenland (i.e., the Upernavik and Qaanaaq areas) detailed information was collected on age category (i.e., old, adult, young, and cubs) and sex of the individual bears that the interviewees had shot. Information on the composition of 588 catches (754 individual bears) going back to the early 1950s was presented in Born et al. (2011). Data on age and sex in the Greenlandic catch of polar bears during 1991-2005 (n = 354) were extracted from the interview survey database (Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, GINR, unpublished) and presented separately for the Kane Basin (KB) and Baffin Bay (BB) subpopulations.

Information on sex and age category (cub, young, adult, old) from individual polar bear kills was obtained from the DFHA based on the filled in forms provided by the licensed hunter for each polar bear killed (2006-2014). In case of catches reported by hunters living in the northernmost area (i.e., the Qaanaaq area) a polar bear may have been taken from either the KB or the BB subpopulation. In several cases coordinates of the location of kill was not given whereas the Greenlandic name of the site was noted by the hunter. In most cases it was possible to determine whether a bear was killed inside the KB management unit (i.e., north of the southern border of the KB management unit area on the Greenland side of the mid-sector line in Smith Sound; this border had been placed more or less arbitrarily at exactly 77° N; cf. Derocher et al. 1998, Taylor et al. 2001), or alternatively in the BB management unit. In cases where

neither coordinates nor name of site of kill were stated, it was assumed that if the reporting hunter lived in the northernmost settlement Siorapaluk the bear had been taken in KB. The hunters in this settlement traditionally harvest bears from the KB management unit (Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990, Born et al. 2011). About 10.0% (5 of 49) of the kills (2006-2014) allocated to KB were based on information about hometown of the hunter reporting (or *ca.* 3.5% of a total of a total of 147 catches reported from the Qaanaaq area).

The file contained information on sex and age category of *ca.* 96% of the total catch reported for KB during 2006-2014, and *ca.* 92% of the catches reported for BB during the same period.

*Detailed Age Structures* – The age (and sex) structure of the Greenland catch of polar bears was examined using several sources of data. Samples (soft tissues and a vestigial tooth, i.e., 1<sup>st</sup> premolar) were collected from 55 BB polar bears caught by the hunters in 2012 and 2013. This sample represents *ca.* 40% of the reported catch in Greenland from the BB subpopulation in 2012 and 2013. The gender of each sample was determined genetically (Chapter 5). Individual ages were obtained from counting growth layer groups in premolar teeth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998).

In 2009-2013, a total of 131 individual BB-polar bears were live captured by GINR during spring (Mar 23-Apr 23) in W and NW Greenland (i.e., between 70° 14' N and 76° 20' N; i.e., between northern Disko Island and the settlement Savissivik) in connection with a study of movement (GINR unpublished data). These bears were tagged on fast ice and in the offshore pack ice in areas where the hunters usually take polar bears and therefore likely represent the sex and age composition of bears available on the polar bear hunting grounds. The gender of each sample was determined in the field and verified genetically (Chapter 5). Individual ages were



obtained from counting growth layer groups in premolar teeth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998). The sex and age composition of this sample was included for comparison. Also for comparative purposes the age structure of a sample of 63 polar bears collected by the subsistence hunters in NW Greenland during 1988-1996 was inferred from figure 26 in Rosing-Asvid (2002:21).

#### Pooling of Canadian and Greenlandic Harvest Data

In contrast to Greenland where harvest is reported on a calendar year, harvest in Canada (Nunavut) is reported and quotas are adjusted on a hunting season basis, as described above. This presented some challenges in pooling data from the two jurisdictions. However, as documented later in this report, most harvesting in Greenland (99% in BB and 87% in KB) occurs between January 1 and June 30. We therefore pooled Greenland and Canadian data and report total harvest for BB and KB on the basis of Canadian harvest seasons. For example, harvest for 1998/99 includes bears harvested in Canada from July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999 and in Greenland for January 1 to December 31, 1999.

#### Genetic Monitoring of Harvest

From 2011 to 2014, as part of genetic mark-recapture studies, the polar bear harvest in BB, KB and surrounding subpopulations was monitored to detect recoveries of genetically ‘marked’ bears. Tissue samples from harvested bears were submitted for genotyping and genetic sexing as described elsewhere in this report (e.g., Chapter 5). This provided data on genetic sex for comparison with the reported sex of each individual thereby allowing us to examine the accuracy of gender reporting. Additionally, several groups of bears that were physically marked with ear tags and lip tattoos during previous studies were detectable from this genetic monitoring

of harvest. Archived tissues samples from all bears physically marked in BB and KB from 1990 to 1997 were genotyped and genetically sexed with the exception of bears whose ages would have been >35 years when genetic monitoring began in 2011 and a small number of individuals ( $n = 15$ ) for which archived tissue samples were unavailable. Bears physically marked in BB and KB from 2010-2013 were also genotyped. Finally, bears marked during a recent physical mark-recapture study in the neighbouring Davis Strait subpopulation (Peacock et al. 2013) were genotyped. The harvest of one of these genetically and physically marked individuals could be detected by two means; the presence of ear tags or lip tattoos as reported by hunters or by matching the genotype of a harvested bear to that of a previously marked bear. This permitted a comparison of the efficiency of detection of marked bears by these two methods.

### 8.3. Results and Discussion

#### Canadian Harvest from BB and KB

*Annual Harvest from Baffin Bay* – In Canada (Nunavut), a total of 1,633 bears were harvested from the BB subpopulation over the period 1992/93 to 2013/14. Mean annual harvest was 74 bears per year ( $SD = 17.13$ , range 49-103,  $n = 22$ ). Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) in Nunavut for the BB subpopulation over this period varied from 64 bears per year in the 1990s up to 105 starting in 2004/05 (Table 8.1). This variation reflects harvest management initiatives at the subpopulation level. An increase in TAH was implemented from 2004/05 to 2009/10 as a result of a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Government of Nunavut and communities in BB. Starting in 2010/11, in response to concerns about the sustainability of the combined Canadian and Greenlandic harvest level, the TAH in Canada (Nunavut) was reduced by 10 bears per year over four years and had decreased to 65 by 2013/14. In most years, harvest

from BB remained within the TAH. From 1996 onwards, exceedances of the allowable harvest resulted in adjustments of allowable harvest for the following year, in accordance with the flexible quota system (see Appendix D).

A majority (96%) of the harvest was comprised of independent bears (i.e.,  $\geq 2$  years old) consistent with regulatory prohibitions on harvesting of family groups except in Defense-of-Life-and-Property (DLP). Also in accordance with the management system, the harvest was sex selective. Pooling data across years, the proportion of females in the harvest was 0.34 for independent bears (excludes COY and yearlings) and 0.35 for all bears which is consistent with the target sex ratio of 0.33 (i.e., 2 or more males per female). From 1996 onward, annual variation around this sex ratio (Figure 8.1: range 0.22 – 0.45) was regulated by the flexible quota system. When more than the recommended number of females were harvested, the TAH for the following season was reduced to compensate for the over harvest of females and deviation above the target sex ratio. Consequently, there was no temporal trend in harvest sex ratio.

*Annual Harvest from Kane Basin* – In Canada (Nunavut), harvest from KB has been minimal over the period 1992/93 to 2013/14 (Table 8.2). Total harvest during this period was 9 bears with a mean annual harvest of 0.4 bears per year (SD = 0.59, range = 0-2, n = 22). The sex ratio of the pooled harvest data (1993-2014) was 33% females (i.e., 2 males per female) consistent with the target sex ratio of the management system. The TAH in Nunavut of 5 bears per year for KB since 1996 has not been exceeded in any year. All bears were harvested in the spring (February to May).

The low level of hunting in KB is in part due to its remoteness and the logistical challenges of travelling in this subpopulation. The nearest Canadian community is Ajuittuq/Grise Fiord on southern Ellesmere Island with a population of <200 people. Access to

KB from Aujuittuq/Grise Fiord involves overland travel across southern Ellesmere Island. Costs for equipment and supplies make this journey less feasible relative to other hunting opportunities in the region (such as Jones Sounds in the Lancaster Sound subpopulation). In addition, spring-time travel into Kane Basin has been increasing in difficulty in recent years due to snow conditions (too little or early melts) on overland trails (M. Akeeagok, pers. comm.).

Traditionally the Kane Basin region was a main polar bear hunting ground for the Inuit living in the Qaanaaq area in Northwest Greenland (Vibe 1968) and it is still an important hunting area for them (Born et al. 2011).

Given the sparsity of the Canadian harvest from KB we do not report further on it in this section.

*Timing of Harvest from Baffin Bay* – Month of harvest was recorded for 1,594 of the 1,633 bears harvested in BB between 1992/93 and 2013/14. Pooling data across years, we examined the distribution of hunting activity across months. Approximately 40% of annual harvesting from Baffin Bay occurred between August and November when bears were on or close to shore. Harvesting activity peaked in October (23% of total).

The three main types of human-caused mortality (i.e., subsistence hunts, sport hunts and the killing of bears in defense, DLP) each varied differently in frequency throughout the year (Figure 8.2). Subsistence hunting activity ( $n = 1,107$ ), termed “regular” hunting, peaked in October (29% of total hunts of this type) and continued through the fall, winter and spring until sea-ice break-up. A majority (91%) of sport hunting ( $n = 248$ ) occurred on the sea ice in spring (March-May). DLPs kills ( $n = 185$ ) peaked in August and declined steadily through the fall. Fifty percent of DLPs occurred in August and September. Notably, this peak in DLPs coincides with the time when bears move to shore from the melting sea ice rather than the timing of freeze-

up (Taylor et al. 2005; Chapter 4). This finding is similar to Dyck (2006) but inconsistent with the hypothesis that human-bear conflicts are driven by poor body condition (Stirling and Parkinson 2006) since body condition will be at a seasonal high point in August, decreasing progressively through the fall (Rode et al. 2011). We speculate that this peak may result from the concentration of bears along the coast as they come off the ice (prior to dispersing inland) combined with the increased range and frequency of boat travel and use of camps by residents of communities along Baffin Island at this time of year. Hence higher rates of DLPs during the summer may be the product of human-bear encounter probability. However, this finding does not discount the hypothesis that bears in poor condition are more likely to come into conflict with people.

*Number of Sport Hunts in Baffin Bay* – Overall, sport hunting accounted for 16% of the harvest from BB in Canada from 1992/93 to 2013/14. Sport hunting activity increased through the 1990s and early 2000s before sharply declining in 2009 (Figure 8.3). This decline in sport hunting after 2008 coincided with two events. First, the 2008 listing of polar bears as “threatened” under the US Endangered Species Act and the subsequent ban on importation of polar bear hides into the US pursuant to the US Marine Mammal Protection Act (US Department of the Interior: Fish and Wildlife Service 2008). Second, Canada’s issuance in 2010 of a negative non-detriment finding for Baffin Bay under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) which triggered a ban on Canada’s export of polar bear hides from this subpopulation. These two events seemingly reduced the pool of sport hunters interested in hunting opportunities in BB (Weber et al. 2015).

*Number of Defense-of-Life-and-Property Kills (DLPs) in Baffin Bay* – Bears killed as DLPs are the only type of polar bear harvest that is not limited by quota in Canada. All DLPs

are deducted from the available quota but the total number of DLPs in a given year is not limited. The number of DLPs in BB varied annually with no apparent trend over the period 1992/93 to 2013/14 (Figure 8.4). DLP-related harvest averaged 8.6 bears per year or about 12% of annual harvest. There was no trend in the proportion of annual TAH allocated to account for DLP kills over the period 1993-2014 (Linear regression,  $F_{1,21} = 0.19$ ,  $P > 0.700$ ). Thus, problems bears do not appear to be using an increasing portion of the available quota in BB.

Restricting the data to independent bears (in this case, independent bears were defined as all individuals except for COYs and yearlings accompanying their mother) during the months of Aug to Nov, when most bears in BB were on land, did not reveal a trend in number of DLPs kills over time (Figure 8.4; Linear regression,  $F_{1,21} = 1.404$ ,  $P > 0.200$ ). The number of DLPs of independent bears during the Aug to Nov period was also unrelated to annual date of spring sea-ice transition (Linear regression,  $F_{1,21} = 0.028$ ,  $P > 0.800$ ), fall transition date (Linear regression,  $F_{1,21} = 0.179$ ,  $P > 0.700$ ) and the number of days between these two dates (used as proxy for length of the ice-free period: Linear regression,  $F_{1,21} = 0.121$ ,  $P > 0.700$ ). This suggests that earlier spring sea-ice break-up, later fall freeze-up and a lengthening ice free period was not associated with increased DLP kills in BB. This finding is inconsistent with the prediction that problem bear kills will increase as sea-ice habitat deteriorates and bears spend more time on land (Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Stirling and Derocher 2012) as has been observed in Western Hudson (Towns et al. 2009). However, we note that the relatively small samples size ( $n = 112$ ) and shorter time series in our study relative to Towns et al. (2009) may have limited the findings. Moreover, unlike the situation in Western Hudson Bay where there is no subsistence hunting of polar bears in the province of Manitoba, some of the bears in BB that were taken by hunters and recorded as part of the subsistence harvest might otherwise have ended up becoming DLPs,

especially those harvested as they approached communities or camps. The number of DLPs recorded amongst our data is thus likely to be an under and somewhat variable estimate of actual or potential DLPs occurring. Our results relating frequency of DLPs to sea-ice conditions should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Grouping data on DLPs into multiyear blocks (1993-95, 1996-00, 2001-05, 2006-10, 2011-13), there was no significant difference in the timing (mean Julian day) of DLPs of independent bears during Aug-Nov (ANOVA,  $F = 0.846$ ,  $P > 0.40$ ).

*Sex Ratio of the Harvest in Baffin Bay* – As reported above, the sex ratio of the harvest from BB for the period 1992/93 to 2013/14 was 0.34 amongst independent bears and 0.35 for amongst all bears. As expected there were significant differences in sex ratio amongst the different types of hunting ( $\chi^2 = 16.03$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $df = 2$ ) with sport hunting being selective for males (3:1 sex ratio) and DLPs being closer to a 1:1 ratio (Fig 8.5). Sport hunting contributes to the maintenance of a male-selective harvest; compensating for the less selective nature of DLPs.

*Age Structure of Harvest in Baffin Bay* – Several features of the harvest management system in Canada (Nunavut) that tend to select for or against bears in certain age ranges. While there is a regulatory limit (i.e., the TAH) on the total number of bears harvested each year and adjustments in this limit are made to compensate for the sex ratio of the harvest, there are no specific limitations on the age of bears harvested in BB; with one exception. A prohibition (under the Nunavut Wildlife Act) on the harvesting of family groups (defined as an adult female accompanied by COYs, yearlings or 2-year-olds), except in defense-of-life-and-property, protects most cubs-of-the-year (COY) and yearlings from hunting, as well as some 2-year-olds. This is reflected in the harvest data. Overall, between 1992/93 and 2013/14, *ca.* 20% (37/189) of

DLPs were adult females and their accompanying offspring. Comparable figures for regular hunting and sport hunts were *ca.* 0.4% (44/1104) and 0% ( $n = 260$ ) respectively.

Sport hunting tends to select for larger, presumably older, adult bears. Looking at the available data on the known or tooth-derived age of harvested bears from BB, there were significant differences in the median ages of harvested female bears amongst the 3 main types of harvest: DLP, regular, sport (Fig 8.6: Kruskal Wallis,  $H = 10.97$ ,  $P = 0.004$ ). Females taken as sport hunts tended to be older than those harvested as DLPs. Similarly, the median age of male bears was significantly different amongst types of hunting (Fig 8.6: Kruskal Wallis,  $H = 61.38$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Sport hunting was highly selective for older males relative to both regular hunts and DLPs. DLPs selected for younger males.

Dyck (2006) found that a majority of DLPs occurring in polar bear subpopulations across Nunavut involved bears  $< 7$  years old. Looking more closely at the age distribution of DLPs for Baffin Bay, we see that most bears ( $\approx 60\%$ ) coming into conflict with people are  $\leq 3$  years of age. Specifically, juveniles aged 2 and 3 years were over-represented amongst the DLPs relative to the ‘population’ age structure derived from mark-recapture sampling, especially amongst males (Figure 8.7; Males:  $\chi^2 = 64.55$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; Females  $\chi^2 = 30.41$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ). Bears aged 2-3 years are at a stage, between weaning and the on-set of sexual maturity, when they may be particularly vulnerable to conflict with humans (Towns et al. 2009). Food availability for these newly independent juveniles may be relatively low since hunting skills are still developing and their relatively small body size limits the ability to compete with larger bears for food. The demands of continued growth during a life-stage of relative food scarcity may lead to poor body condition and reduced survival amongst this age class particularly as environmental conditions deteriorate (Regehr et al. 2007). Poor body condition may increase the tendency for



juveniles to seek food from sites of human activity. Additionally, these individuals may be naïve with respect to risks of interacting with humans; having not yet acquired learned aversions to humans and adopted avoidance behaviors.

Annual variation in the ages of harvested bears was examined by sex and harvest type for the period 1992/93 and 2010; the period for which data were available. The median age of harvested bears did not exhibit trends over time for any of the different types of hunting (for example see Figure 8.8).

### Greenlandic Harvest from BB and KB

*Annual Harvest from BB* – Sport hunting of polar bears is not permitted in Greenland (Anon. 2005). Hence, the only harvest types recorded by the management authorities are (1) regular subsistence harvest under quota, (2) bears killed in Defense-Life-and-Property (DLPs), and (3) illegal hunts.

The Greenlanders' catch of polar bears from the BB subpopulation according to the Piniarneq catch recording system (see Appendix D) during 1993-2005 (i.e., the year before introduction of quotas) are shown in Figure 8.9. The trend in numbers reported per year during 1993-2005 in the Qaanaaq area (i.e., north of the Upernavik area) is not statistically significant ( $R = 0.272$ ,  $Z = 0.881$ ,  $P = 0.378$ ,  $n=13$ ). However, the catch in the Uummannaq-Sisimiut area (i.e., south of Upernavik) increased statistically significantly during the same period ( $R = 0.594$ ,  $Z = 2.163$ ,  $P = 0.031$ ,  $n=13$ ). The catch in these areas amounted to *ca.* 24% of the total catch reported by Greenlanders from BB during 1993-2005. Similarly, the catch reported from the Upernavik area ( between *ca.* 74° 35' N and *ca.* 71° 30' N ) increased significantly during the same period ( $R = 0.794$ ,  $Z = 3.426$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ,  $n = 13$ ). On average the reported catch of polar

bears in the Upernavik area amounted to *ca.* 57% of the total catch reported in Greenland from BB during 1993-2005 (Figure 8.9). Hence, there are indications that the Greenland catch of polar bears from BB showed a real increase and especially after *ca.* 2000. An increase in availability of polar bears in the Upernavik area during the 1990s and 2000s was also indicated by traditional ecological knowledge, TEK (Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990, Born et al. 2011).

The Piniarneq-data have played an important role in the assessment of abundance and trends in abundance of the BB and the KB subpopulations. Since 1993, the Piniarneq-data on annual catch for the shared subpopulations (BB, KB and DS) as compiled and published by the DFHA have been provided annually to the Canadian Polar Bear Technical Committee and to the meetings of the IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group. The data have been incorporated with the reported catch of polar bears in Nunavut from BB in modeling of subpopulation status (e.g., Aars et al. 2006, York et al. 2016). In a PVA (Population Viability Analysis) re-assessment of polar bear subpopulations including BB and KB based on historical data, York et al. (2016) simply assumed that the Greenland catch of polar bears reported in Piniarneq for BB was/are overestimated (“over-reporting”). However, these authors did not present any validation of the Piniarneq-data or new evidence in support of this assumption (Ibid.). As indicated in the previous other evidence suggests that the increase in the Greenlanders’ catch from BB during 1993-2005 was real. Although over-reporting, or under-reporting, to an unknown extent cannot be ruled out.

*Annual Harvest from KB* – During 1993-2005 (i.e., prior to introduction of quotas in Greenland in 2006) the Greenland annual catch of polar bears from the Kane Basin (KB) subpopulation was 11 (SD = 4.4 bears, range: 6-25/year; n= 13 years) with no apparent trend.

However, it should be noted that during 1993-1999 the annual catches from KB were estimated at 10 each year during 1993-1999 (PBSG 2002, 2010) based on an interview survey in 1989 (Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990). The statistics on annual catches after 1999 were based on reportings in Piniarneq (2000-2005) and special reporting forms under the quota system (2006-2014).

After the introduction of quotas the Greenlanders' catch of polar bears from the KB management unit (2006-2014) has averaged 6/year (SD = 1.7, range: 2-8/year, n = 9).

*Defense-of-Life-and-Property Kills (DLPs)* – No defense kills were reported for the Kane Basin subpopulation during 2006-2014. During the same period 7 defense kills were reported for the Baffin Bay subpopulation (2007: 2, 2011: 1, 2012: 4). The kills comprised 1 young male, 3 adult females, 1 young with sex not stated, and 2 with sex and age not stated. The months during which these incidences occurred were: January (n = 1), February (1), July (2), October (2) and December (1). Hence, since the introduction of quotas in 2006 when the recording of defense kills began, there have been no apparent annual or seasonal trends in defense kills from the KB and BB subpopulations.

In Greenland DLPs in one year are not subtracted from next year quota (DFHA, *in litt.* 2016).

*Uncertainties in Catch Reporting* – Prior to 2006, when quotas were introduced, there was significant uncertainty in the accuracy of the reported polar bear harvest (catch) from BB and KB in Greenland. Reporting occurred via the Piniarneq system. It has been suggested that the polar bear catch reported through the Piniarneq system may be both an under-estimate (i.e., some kills not reported) and an over-estimate (Born 1998, 2002, 2006, Jessen 2002, Rosing-Asvid 2002) of the actual catch. To obtain a hunting license for the coming year, a hunter must

report his catch through the Piniarneq (in practice the catch of all species is reported in a booklet). Inevitably, a hunter may sometimes fail to report a catch of a particular species. Very often several hunters participate in a polar bear hunt (Rosing-Asvid 2002, Born et al. 2011). “Multiple reporting” (*i.e.*, one kill is reported by more than one hunter) leading to an over-estimate may thus occur when several hunters, who have participated in the same hunt and are proud that a bear was taken, each report the same kill via Piniarneq regardless of whether they shot the bear (Jessen 2002).

When evaluating the Piniarneq shortly after it was introduced, Kapel and Rosing-Asvid (1996) wrote that some hunters were not used to paperwork, and they may not see the point of keeping exact notes on the dates and numbers of animals taken. Whether this resulted in under-reporting, over-reporting, or just arbitrary reporting in order to have something to report when renewing the license, was not clear (*Ibid.*). In a study of the Greenland catch of ringed seals, Teilmann and Kapel (1998) identified examples of both under-reporting and over-reporting.

Generally, the numbers reported in Piniarneq are higher than those reported in the previous system of recording catches (*i.e.*, The Hunters Lists of Game, *cf.* Teilmann and Kapel 1998). This apparent difference may be caused by several factors: (1) previous information was incomplete and the estimates of unreported catches too low, (2) the Piniarneq-system overestimates the catch due to “multiple”-reporting, (3) a real increase in the catch, or (4) a combination of all these factors. An example of sources of error in *Piniarneq* is the report in 2004 of 24 and 10 polar bears reported for Sisimiut and Maniitsoq, respectively (Born and Sonne 2006). Some of these (10 and 5) were reported by hunters with a “part-time” hunting license and were suspected to be of muskoxen (O. Heinrich, DFHA, *in litt.* 2005).

Rosing-Asvid (2002) compared information from various sources (trade in hide, information from sampling of biological tissues, and interview survey and Piniarneq) about the catch of polar bears in Greenland for the period 1993–1998. He found cases of under-reporting and of over-reporting. In the Piniarneq, simple errors like ringed seals reported as walruses or polar bears occur. However, validation of the information is not a standard procedure and some over-reporting is found in most of the species where the annual catch is low (Rosing-Asvid 2002). Another type of error may occur because the hunter does not have to report to Piniarneq where the polar bear was shot. The kill is assigned to the municipality in which the hunter lives and is therefore in some cases misplaced if the hunter has taken the bear in another area (ibid.).

According to Rosing-Asvid (2002) validating the Piniarneq-data was (is) not a standard procedure and some over-reporting is found in most of the species where the annual harvest is low. The number of polar bear kills reported in Central Greenland might be overestimated with this new reporting system, however, the trend toward more polar bears caught in West Greenland since the mid 1980's is undoubtedly real. For the period 1970-87 the reported catches only averaged 2/year in Central West Greenland, which is less than reported through the media in the latest years or by forms that for some kills have been filled out at local offices since 1995. The interviewed hunters from Upernavik also reported a marked increase in the number of polar bears in the area since mid-1980s (Born et al. 2011).

As indicated the Piniarneq-data may in some cases represent under-reporting and in other cases “over-“ or “multiple”-reporting. As there has been no standard procedure in place in Greenland for validating to which extent (and/or in which direction) the Piniarneq-system is influenced by these potential errors when comes to polar bears one must be cautious when using and interpreting the data in Piniarneq, as pointed out by Born (2002).

Because of a good correlation between the number of ringed seal hides traded and the number of ringed seals reported via Piniarneq in the Upernavik municipality, Rosing-Asvid (2002) concluded that generally the Piniarneq system worked (works) well in this area (*Ibid.*). Hence, he indicated that the increase in reported catches of polar bears in the Upernavik area from the BB subpopulation was real. The average reported catch of polar bears in the Upernavik area during 1970-1987 (HLG) was 9 bears/year (range: 1-41/year) whereas during 1993-1998 it was 37 bears/year (range: 25-48/year) according to the Piniarneq (*Ibid.*).

*Timing of Harvest in Baffin Bay* – The Greenlanders catch of polar bears from the Baffin Bay subpopulation is almost exclusively concentrated in winter and spring (Jan-Jun). About 99% (n = 589) of the catches reported with month during 2006-2014 were taken during this period. The remaining *ca.* 1% (n = 5) is caught during Sep-Dec (Figure 8.10). This timing of the catches is in marked contrast to the situation in Nunavut where *ca.* 40% of the harvest is between Aug-Nov with a peak in October.

About 99% of the bears reported from BB were caught during Jan-Jun which is in contrast to pre-2006 when a relatively larger proportion was taken during fall and early winter. The fact that the catches have been more concentrated to the beginning of the year may be a result of the quota for BB (the quota year starts 1 January) being used up fast. According to the interviews conducted in NW Greenland in 2006 the availability of polar bears during spring in BB has increased (Born et al. 2011) which may explain that the quota is used up relatively soon and the catches therefore concentrated to late winter and spring.

*Timing of Harvest in Kane Basin* – Of 49 catches reported from the Kane Basin subpopulation during 2006-2014, 87.8% (n = 43) were taken during winter-spring (Jan-Jun) with

a clear peak in April. Twenty-six (53.1%) of these catches were taken during April. The remainder (12.2%) of the catches were reported from summer and fall (Aug-Oct); Figure 8.11.

The tendency with a peak in hunting activity in Kane Basin in March-April and a less pronounced peak in fall was also seen prior to 2006 (Born et al. 2011:185). However, after 2006 the seasonal distribution of catches from the KB subpopulation has shown a more conspicuous peak in April. It should however, be noted that the sample size from KB was small.

*Means of Transportation* – In some cases information on means of transportation used during the polar bear hunt is lacking from the reports on individual catches. However, during 2006-2014 there was information on means of transportation used during 445 individual polar bear hunts from areas between Kane Basin and Sisimiut (i.e., from the KB and BB subpopulations, respectively). Overall, 63.6% of the bears had been caught during a hunt involving dog sled. During 35.3% of the hunts a skiff was used and only in 1.1% (n = 5) of the cases the bear was caught from a <20 BRT/15 BT boat.

*Means of Transportation in Baffin Bay* – There was regional variation in means of transportation used during polar bear hunts in Baffin Bay. In Subareas 3 and 4 (encompassing the Melville Bay and the Upernavik areas) where *ca.* 85% of the Greenlanders' annual catch of bears from the BB subpopulation are taken, an average of 71.1% of the bears are caught during dog sled trips (the remainder are taken from skiffs) with a clear difference between the northern part and the southern part of the area (Table 8.3) reflecting differences in density of sea-ice cover and timing spring break-up. In Subareas 5 and 6 (Uummannaq, Disko Bay and areas south to Sisimiut) where only *ca.* 15% of the bears caught by Greenlanders' from the BB subpopulation are taken, 7.8% of the bears reported during 2006-2014 were killed during dog sled hunts, 88.2% were taken from skiff and 3.9% from a small boat (Table 8.3). These areas have open water (or

light pack ice conditions) during winter and/or early spring (e.g., Buch 2001). Dog sleds were used in 93.5% of the cases in the important polar bear hunting areas 1-3 and in 20.8% of the cases in areas 4-6 (i.e., the areas south of 74° N). This difference in means of transportation between the two overall areas was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 246.283$ ,  $P < 0.0001$ ,  $df = 1$ ).

Only in one instance during 2006-2014 was it specified that a polar bear had been caught during a hunt involving the use of a snowmobile (using a snowmobile in connection with hunting polar bears is illegal in Greenland; Anon. 2005). This case involved the illegal kill of a male bear in the Sisimiut area in March 2011.

In none of the areas was there a statistically significant annual trend in fraction of bears taken from skiff or boat during 2006-2014 (linear regressions of weighted percentages of skiff+boat versus year; data not shown).

*Means of Transportation in Kane Basin* – Of 39 individual polar bear catches (2006-2014) from the Kane Basin subpopulation (i.e., Subarea 1 and 2; only 2 catches reported from Subarea 2), 76.9% were taken from dog sled, 15.4% from skiffs 7.7% from a boat. The catches from skiffs and boats were taken during May ( $n = 1$ ) and June-October ( $n = 8$ ); Table 8.3.

The data on means of transportation showed a marked north-south gradient in the use of sleds vs. skiffs related both to differences in hunting traditions and availability of dense fast or pack ice. In the southern areas where sea-ice conditions to a large extent are influenced by the inflow of relatively warm current from the south (e.g., Buch 2001) the majority of polar bears are taken from skiffs (and in a few cases from small-type fishing vessels) whereas in the areas north of ca. 74° N, where there is fast ice and dense pack ice, the majority of polar bears are caught by dog sled and this means of transportation is still an important element in the traditional way of living and hunting. The 2006-interview survey indicated that there has been an increase in the



use of skiffs for hunting polar bears especially in the Upernavik area since the early 1990s (Born et al. 2011). This development was ascribed to the fact that the sea-ice conditions have become more unstable (for driving a dog sled) and there is an earlier spring ice break-up (ibid.). The same tendency was indicated in the 2006-2014 records of hunting methods (present study) but was not statistically significant.

Hence, in Greenland, the majority of polar bears that are taken from the KB and BB subpopulations are still taken during dedicated polar bear hunts where the dog sled (in the majority of cases) is used for transportation and tracking of polar bears. This maintains an old and traditional way of hunting polar bears.

Since 1968 snowmobiles have been used increasingly in the polar bear hunt. In Arctic Canada, polar bears are nowadays hunted almost exclusively with snowmobiles (except for guided sport hunts, which are required to use a dog team); Slavik (2013 and references therein).

*Sex Ratio in Baffin Bay* – The sex and age composition of the Greenlanders' catch of polar bears from the BB and KB subpopulations is presented in Table 8.4 and 8.5, respectively.

In Baffin Bay the relative proportions of independent polar bear females and males in three different sets of data (1982-2005; Table 8.4) were not statistically different ( $\chi^2 = 1.096$ ,  $P = 0.578$ ,  $df = 2$ ). Overall, independent females constituted *ca.* 28.3% of the total annual catch (note: including cubs which constituted *ca.* 20% of the catch) prior to 2006.

Independent female polar bears constituted *ca.* 32.5% of the total annual catch during 2006-2014. Overall, the ratio of independent F:M in the catch was *ca.* 1:2 both during 1982-2005 and 2006-2014.

In a sample of 55 bears (2012 and 2013) for which gender was determined genetically and tooth-derived ages were known independent females constituted 45.5% (Table 8.4). The

relative proportions of independent females and males in this sample differed significantly at the 5% level from those in the larger sample (2006-2014) which was based on reports from the hunters ( $\chi^2 = 3.972$ ,  $P = 0.046$ ,  $df = 1$ ).

*Sex Ratio in Kane Basin* – In Kane Basin the relative proportions of independent polar bear females and males in three different sets of data (1982-2005; Table 8.5) did not differ ( $\chi^2 = 4.609$ ,  $P = 0.099$ ,  $df = 2$ ). Overall, independent females constituted *ca.* 25.4% of the total annual catch (note: including cubs which made up *ca.* 8% of the total catch) prior to the introduction of quotas in 2006. During 2006-2014 independent female polar bears constituted *ca.* 44.9% of the total annual catch (note: after 2005 it has been illegal to catch dependent cubs irrespective of their age). The relative proportions of independent females and males during 1982-2005 and 2006-2014, respectively, differed significantly ( $\chi^2 = 5.130$ ,  $P = 0.024$ ,  $df = 1$ ); independent females constituting a higher proportion of the catch in KB after 2006. However, it must be kept in mind that the basis for data before 2005 is heterogeneous and sample size after 2006 is relatively small.

*Age Structure* – In a hunter collected sample of a total of 55 polar bears caught in BB Greenland during 2012 and 2013 individuals less than 10 years of age constituted 85.5% and  $\geq 10$  years olds were 14.5% of the catch. The oldest bears were two 17 year old females (Figure 8.12). In comparison, polar bears less than 10 years of age (i.e., 2-9 years of age) constituted 63.9% and 10+ olds 36.1%, respectively, in the sample of live captured bears (2009-2013) from BB. Hence, the proportion of polar bears  $\geq 10$  years of age was significantly higher than in the sample from the harvest ( $\chi^2 = 8.026$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ,  $df = 1$ ). The oldest live captured polar bear was a 23 year old male (Figure 8.13).

Adult (i.e., sexually mature) females were defined as greater  $\geq 4$  years old and adult males as greater than or equal to 5 years old (Molnár et al. 2008). The relative proportion of sexually immature and sexually mature polar bears in the 2012-2013-sample did not differ significantly from a sample of 55 polar bears aged 2+ sampled in NW Greenland during 1988-1996 (Rosing-Asvid 2002: figure 26;  $\chi^2 = 1.094$ ,  $P = 0.296$ ,  $df = 1$ ). COYs and 1 year olds were excluded from this comparison because only the sample from 1988-1996 contained these age groups. The oldest bear in the 1988-1996- sample was a 16 year old female.

Polar bear cubs usually follow the mother for two years and are weaned at 2.5 years of age although some are weaned already during their second spring (range: 1.3-2.3 years; Lønø 1970, Lentfer et al. 1980, Ramsay and Stirling 1986, Amstrup and Durner 1995). Hence for modeling purposes bears 3 years of age and older are considered “independent” or “adult (Taylor et al. 1987). Prior to introduction of quotas (2006) it was prohibited to catch COYs and yearlings in W and NW Greenland whereas after 2005 it became prohibited to take dependent cubs (i.e., cubs demonstrably belonging to a family group) irrespective of their age. Hence, we assume that the 2-year-olds reported in the Greenland catch in recent years (Figure 8.12) had left their mothers. Rosing-Asvid (2002: figure 26) presented an age composition of a sample (1988-1996) that comprises COYs, yearlings and 2-year-olds. Hence, due to differences in hunting regulations during the two periods (i.e., prior and after quotas were introduced) only 2-year-olds and older bears were considered in the comparison of age-structure in the catch. The recent sample from the catch and the sample from 1988-96 did not comprise any bears older than 17 years of age. In the sample from NW Greenland (1988-1996) Rosing-Asvid (2002) found the oldest male to be 14 years and the oldest female 16 years of age. A comparison of the two

admittedly not large data sets indicates no change in age composition of the Greenlanders catch from BB over time.

The finding of relatively few polar bears  $\geq 10$  years of age and no individuals older than 17 years of age in the harvest is perhaps surprising and in contrast to the situation in the sample of live captured bears (2009-2013) from NW Greenland.

The sample from the harvest in Nunavut from Baffin Bay contained several bears older than 17 year of age (*cf.* Figure 8.7).

In contrast, in Central East Greenland where in a sample of 238 polar bears (1983-1996; Rosing-Asvid 2002: figure 8) *ca.* 9% were older than 16 years. The oldest female was 26 years and the oldest male 30 years (*ibid.*).

#### Combined Canadian and Greenlandic Harvest from BB and KB

*Baffin Bay* – Data from Nunavut and Greenland were combined to examine overall harvest levels in BB for the period 1993-2014 (Table 8.6). Mean annual harvest was 163 bears (SD = 37.9, range 120-268,  $n = 22$  years). For the period 1993-2005, prior to the introduction of a quota in Greenland, the mean annual total harvest was 165 bears (SD = 48.9, range = 120-268,  $n = 13$  years). For period 2006-2014, after the introduction of a quota in Greenland, the mean annual harvest was 161 bears (SD = 13.6, range = 138-176,  $n = 9$  years).

Total harvest in Baffin Bay peaked between 2002 and 2005 (Figure 8.14). This peak was the result of two events: (1) an increase in allowable harvest in Canada in 2004 (from 64 to 105 bears per year) as part of a new management agreement for the subpopulation and (2) a large increase in reported harvest in Greenland.

Total harvest declined after 2005 through to 2014 as a result of two management initiatives: (1) the introduction of a quota in Greenland in 2006 and a subsequent decrease in annual quotas and (2) implementation of a phased reduction (10 bears per year for 4 years) in Total Allowable Harvest in Canada.

The sex ratio of the reported harvest has remained around 2:1 (male: females) with an annual mean of 0.35 females amongst independent bears.

*Kane Basin* – Total estimated harvest in Kane Basin for the period 1993-2014 (Table 8.2) was 204 bears with a mean of 9.3 bears per year (SD = 4.63, n = 22, range = 3-26). Prior to the introduction of a quota in Greenland, mean estimated harvest in KB was 11.6 bears/year (1993-2005: SD = 4.61, n = 13, range 6-26). Following the introduction of a quota in Greenland, harvest decreased to a mean of 5.9 bears/year (2006-2014: SD = 1.62, n = 9, range = 3-9).

Thus since the introduction of a quota, the estimated harvest has halved in size and there has been a significant reduction in annual variation. However, the uncertainty of the number of polar bears taken from KB prior to 2006 must be mentioned. The polar bear hunters living in the Qaanaaq area in NW Greenland harvest polar bears both from the Kane Basin and from the Baffin Bay subpopulation (e.g., Born et al. 2011). The annual reports of total catch in the Qaanaaq area during 1993-1999 did not specify whether a bear had been taken from KB or from BB, respectively. Consequently it was assumed that 10 of the total number of polar bears reported from the Qaanaaq annually had been extracted from KB during this period. The remainder was assumed to have been taken from the BB subpopulation. However, the estimate of 10/year for KB represented the upper range of an estimate of 5-10/year which was based on an interview survey conducted in 1989 (Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990, 1995, PBSG 2010). During 2000-2005 the estimates of the fraction of bears reported from the Qaanaaq area that had been

taken in KB were based on location of settlement reporting whereas during 2006-2014 the numbers are based on report of actual site of the kill.

Adding to the uncertainty of the exact number of polar bears that are taken by Greenland from the KB subpopulations is the simple fact that it cannot be determined with any certainty whether a bear taken in the central parts of the Qaanaaq area (i.e., close to the border at 77° N between the KB and BB management zone) belong the KB or the BB subpopulation. This uncertainty will of course have greater implications for the relatively small catch from KB than for BB.

Overall for the period 1993-2014, the estimated sex ratio of bears harvested in Kane Basin was 33% females. However, the sex ratio of the harvest since the introduction of a quota in Greenland has been approximately 44% female (based on pooled data for the period 2006-2014).

#### Accuracy of Harvest Reporting as Assessed from Genetic Studies of Sex and Individual Identity

*Reporting of the Sex of Harvested Bears* – During the recent genetic mark-recapture studies in BB and KB (2011-14) bears harvested in BB, KB and surrounding subpopulations were genotyped to establish genetic sex and individual identity in-order to detect recoveries of genetically marked (biopsied) individuals (Table 8.7). Rates of tissue sampling, reporting of sex and genotyping of bears harvested in BB and KB were less than 100%. Overall, 270 (75%) of the 359 bears that were reported as harvested in BB during the mark-recapture sampling period were tissue sampled and genotyped. For Kane Basin, 4 (40%) of the 10 harvested bears were genotyped. Sampling of harvested bears was lower in Greenland than Nunavut.

Using these genotyped bears we compared the gender of harvested bears as reported in harvest records in Canada and Greenland to the gender as determined by genetics. As part of the genetic analyses, conflicts between reported and genetic sex were investigated via additional genotyping to confirm genetic sex (see description of genetic methods in Chapter 5). Thus confidence in the genetic sex data is high. The results indicate there was significant inaccuracy in gender reporting with a bias towards under reporting of females. Pooling data for Canada and Greenland, 16% of genetic females in the harvest were reported as males (Table 8.8). In contrast, 4% of genetic males were reported as females. The bias was greatest in the Greenland harvest, where 39% of genetic females were reported as males and 12% of genetic males were reported as female (Table 8.9 and Figure 8.15a). In Nunavut, 5% of females were reported as males. Two percent of males were reported as females (Table 8.10 and Figure 8.15b). Overall, the sex composition of the genotyped harvest as reported in official harvest records was 37% females. The genetic composition of this harvest was 42% females. For the Greenland harvest, the sex composition of the reported harvest was 39% females. The genetic composition was 54% females. For the Nunavut harvest, the sex composition of the reported harvest was 36% females. The genetic composition was 37% females. Considering only independent bears (subadults & adults), for the Greenland harvest, the sex composition of the reported harvest was 40% females. The genetic composition was 54% females. For the Nunavut harvest, the sex composition of the reported harvest was 36% females. The genetic composition was 36% females.

Assuming these data are representative of the overall harvest, harvest in Greenland appears to be non-selective for sex. Harvest in Nunavut is approximately 2:1 males to females in accordance with target sex ratio of the flexible quota management system. In Nunavut

verification of the sex of harvested bears is a regulatory requirement. Hunters are required to submit the baculum from harvested males. Where proof of sex is not provided sex is verified by genotyping. Our finding that gender reporting in the Canadian (Nunavut) data is accurate was thus expected.

Inaccuracies in reporting the sex of harvested bears is a management issue for these subpopulations. Determination of sustainable harvest levels in part depends on the sex ratio of the harvest (Taylor et al. 2008b; Regehr et al. 2015). The less selective the harvest, the lower the sustainable harvest. Incorrect reporting of gender for harvested bears may also be an issue for some of the past demographic analyses for BB and KB (e.g., PVA's) that have been used to establish quotas and subpopulation status; albeit to an unknown extent at present.

*Reporting of Marked Bears in the Harvest* – Using data for bears that were physically marked (tagged and tattooed) in either Baffin Bay (1990-1997) or Davis Strait (2005-2007), and subsequently also genotyped, we examined the accuracy of reporting of ear tagged and lip tattooed bears in the harvest relative to the detection of these marked bears via genotyping. Due to small samples sizes we pooled data on recoveries of physically marked bears in Nunavut and Greenland.

In the harvest data for Baffin Bay for the period 2011-2014, 9 recoveries of physically marked bears were detected by genotyping, 4 of which were not reported as tagged or tattooed in official harvest records. Expanding this dataset to the Davis Strait harvest records, resulted in detection of 42 physically marked bears, 12 of which were unreported as marked in harvest records. One of the unreported marks was a Greenland harvest record.

Approximately 29% of recoveries were not reported as being marked. These findings suggest that a significant portion of physically marked bears that are recovered in the harvest are



undetected via the harvest reporting systems currently in place. Although the data are limited, detection probability appears to be a function of the age of a mark; the interval between application of tags and tattoos and subsequent harvest (Fig 8.16). Older marks are less likely to be reported suggesting that loss of tags or fading of tattoos may affect the ability of hunters to detect when they have harvested a marked bear. Indeed, in cases where marked bears were reported in the harvest, 62% were reported based on the presence of lip tattoos only. Examining data for bears physically marked in the Baffin Bay during 1990-97 that were recaptured during the recent Davis Strait inventory (2005-07) we found that 24 of 24 marked individuals whose recapture was detected by genotyping were also detected as marked by field workers. In most cases, notes on the field data sheets indicated that the recaptured bears had lost both ear-tags and were identified by means of their lip tattoo only. Mean capture interval (i.e., age of mark) was 11 years (range 8 to 15) amongst this sample of 24. This suggests that loss of ear-tags is the primary problem affecting detection of marked bears in the harvest. These findings also suggest that the problem of detecting marked individuals may be limited to the harvest data only.

The implications of this finding require careful consideration with respect to past and future mark-recapture studies. The assumption that all marked bears recovered in the harvest are reported, an assumption made in previous polar bear mark-recapture studies in Baffin Bay (Taylor et al. 2005, Peacock et al. 2012), Kane Basin (Taylor et al. 2008a), Davis Strait (Peacock et al. 2013) and elsewhere, appears to be invalid. Under-reporting of marked bears in the harvest may have introduced bias resulting in underestimation of natural survival rates in these studies. However, the extent (significance) of the bias is unknown at present. We recommend further investigation of this issue.

In our admittedly limited sample of harvest recoveries, detection of marks  $\leq 5$  years old

was > 90%. Moving forward, this finding highlights the importance of maintaining a sample of recently (within 5 years) marked bears in the subpopulation when relying on detection of physical marks to estimate survival rates. Alternatively, we recommend genetic monitoring of the harvest in future studies where detection of ‘old’ marks is anticipated to play an important role. Further research into materials and designs for increasing the endurance of ear-tags may also be warranted.

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**Table 8.1.** Summary of Canadian polar bear harvest from the Baffin Bay subpopulation for the period 1992/93 to 2013/14.

Harvest Season <sup>1</sup>	Total Harvest	Total Allowable Harvest <sup>2</sup>	Proportion Female (Total Harvest) <sup>3</sup>	Proportion of Harvest Made up of Independent Bears <sup>4</sup>	Proportion Female (Independent Bears Only) <sup>5</sup>
1992/93	62	n/a	0.36	0.94	0.35
1993/94	60	n/a	0.37	0.88	0.34
1994/95	60	64	0.33	0.92	0.35
1995/96	55	64	0.33	0.95	0.35
1996/97	60	64	0.41	0.88	0.42
1997/98	69	64	0.38	0.96	0.38
1998/99	49	64	0.35	0.98	0.36
1999/00	58	64	0.41	0.95	0.40
2000/01	61	64	0.28	0.98	0.28
2001/02	64	64	0.30	1.00	0.30
2002/03	62	64	0.26	0.97	0.22
2003/04	69	64	0.28	0.99	0.25
2004/05	101	105	0.37	0.98	0.38
2005/06	94	105	0.32	0.98	0.28
2006/07	89	105	0.36	0.99	0.38
2007/08	101	105	0.28	0.97	0.26
2008/09	103	105	0.39	0.98	0.39
2009/10	86	105	0.41	1.00	0.41
2010/11	94	95	0.33	0.98	0.34
2011/12	90	85	0.40	0.96	0.37
2012/13	74	75	0.47	0.92	0.45
2013/14	72	65	0.31	0.97	0.29
Mean	74.23		0.35	0.96	0.34

<sup>1</sup> The hunting season in Canada runs from July 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) is the regulated limit for all human-caused mortalities. Formerly referred to as the quota

<sup>3</sup> Excludes bears of unknown sex (which constituted a mean of *ca.* 1% of harvest annually for the period 1989/90 to 2013/14)

<sup>4</sup> Excludes bears of unknown dependency (which constituted a mean of *ca.* 4% of harvest annually for the period 1989/90 to 2013/14)

<sup>5</sup> Excludes bears of unknown sex and dependency

**Table 8.2.** Canadian and Greenlandic polar bear harvest from the Kane Basin subpopulation for the period 1992/93 to 2013/14.

Harvest Season <sup>1</sup>	Total Harvest	Total Allowable Harvest <sup>2</sup>	Harvest (Canada)	Harvest (Greenland) <sup>3</sup>	Proportion Female (Independent bears only)
1992/93	10	-	0	10	0.25
1993/94	11	-	1	10	0.23
1994/95	10	-	0	10	0.25
1995/96	10	-	0	10	0.25
1996/97	11	-	1	10	0.23
1997/98	12	-	2	10	0.30
1998/99	11	-	1	10	0.23
1999/00	6	-	0	6	0.25
2000/01	11	-	1	10	0.32
2001/02	12	-	0	12	0.25
2002/03	12	-	0	12	0.25
2003/04	9	-	0	9	0.25
2004/05	26	-	1	25	0.28
2005/06	9	-	1	8	0.40
2006/07	6	15	0	6	0.46
2007/08	7	13	0	7	0.46
2008/09	5	11	0	5	0.46
2009/10	3	11	1	2	0.30
2010/11	6	11	0	6	0.46
2011/12	6	11	0	6	0.46
2012/13	6	11	0	6	0.46
2013/14	5	11	0	5	0.46
Mean	9.3	11.8	0.4	8.9	0.33

<sup>1</sup> Greenland harvest data for a given calendar year were included in the harvest season ending in that calendar year

<sup>2</sup> No quota in Greenland prior to 2006 thus total quota only presented for period 2006-2014

<sup>3</sup> Annual harvest in Greenland (1993-1999) was estimated from an interview survey conducted in 1989 (Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990). Information on annual catch was based on information in Piniarneq during 2000-2005 and thereafter on the special reporting under the quota system (see Appendix D)



**Table 8.3.** Means of transportation used during 445 polar bears catches in West and Northwest Greenland from Subareas 1 and 2 (i.e., the Kane Basin subpopulation) and Subareas 3-6 (the Baffin Bay subpopulation) during 2006-2014.

Subarea	Dog sled	Skiff	Boat	Total	% Dog sled	% skiff and boat
1+2 <sup>1</sup>	30	6	3	39	76.9	23.1
3	215	8	0	223	96.4	3.6
4	34	98	0	132	25.8	74.2
5	4	25	0	29	13.8	86.2
6	0	20	2	22	0.0	100.0
Total	283	157	5	445	63.6	36.4

<sup>1</sup> Only 2 catches reported from Subarea 2

**Table 8.4.** Sex and age composition of the Greenland catch of polar bears from the BB subpopulation (1982-2014) based on various sources.

Period	% Females <sup>1</sup>	% Males <sup>1</sup>	Independent F:M ratio	% Cubs	F (n)	Cubs (n)	M (n)	Total (n)	Source	Source
1982-1989	29.9	57.7	1:1.9	12.4	41	17	79	137	Interviews 1989-90	Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990, Rosing-Asvid 2000
1988-1996	33.3	46.0	1:1.4	20.6	21	13	29	63	Samples	Rosing-Asvid <sup>2</sup> 2002: table 3
1991-2005	26.8	50.6	1:1.9	22.6	95	80	179	354	Interviews 2006	Born unpublished, and Born <i>et al.</i> 2011
1982-2005	28.3	51.8	1:1.9	19.9	157	110	287	554		
2006-2014	32.2	67.8	1:2.1	0.0	192	n.a. <sup>3</sup>	404	596	Special Reporting Forms	2006-13:DFHA <sup>4</sup> <i>in litt.</i> (2014), 2014:DFHA <i>in litt.</i> (2015)
2012-2013	45.5	54.5	1:1.2	0.0	25	n.a.	30	55	Samples	Samples collected by hunters, GINR unpublished
2006-2014	32.5	67.5	1:2.1	0.0	193	n.a.	401	594		

<sup>1</sup> Percentage of total annual catch. Adult and subadult females and adult and subadult males = individuals 3 years old and older (*cf.* Taylor et al. 1987)

<sup>2</sup> A comparison of figure 26 and table 3 in Rosing-Asvid (2002) shows that the percentages of independent bears given in his table 3 are based on 2+ years old bears

<sup>3</sup> Since 2006 it has been prohibited to kill dependent cubs irrespective of their age

<sup>4</sup> DFHA = Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture (Nuuk)

**Table 8.5.** Sex and age composition of the Greenland catch of polar bears from the KB subpopulation (1982-2014) based on various sources.

Period	% Females <sup>1</sup>	% Males <sup>1</sup>	Independent F:M ratio	% Cubs	F (n)	Cubs (n)	M (n)	Total (n)	Source	Source
1982-1989	29.2	63.1	1:2.2	7.7	19	5	41	65	Interviews 1989-90	Rosing-Asvid and Born 1990, Rosing-Asvid 2000
1988-1996	36.7	56.7	1:1.5	6.7	11	2	17	30	Samples	Rosing-Asvid 2002: table 3
1991-2005	17.9	73.1	1:4.1	9.0	14	7	57	78	Interviews 2006	Born unpublished, and Born et al. 2011
1982-2005	25.4	66.5	1:2.6	8.1	44	14	115	173		
2006-2014	44.9	55.1	1:1.2	0.0	22	n.a. <sup>2</sup>	27	49	Special Reporting Forms	2006-13:DFHA <sup>3</sup> <i>in litt.</i> (2014), 2014:DFHA <i>in litt.</i> (2015)

<sup>1</sup> Independent females as percentage of total annual catch

<sup>2</sup> Since 2006 it has been prohibited to kill dependent cubs irrespective of their age

<sup>3</sup> DFHA = Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture (Nuuk)

**Table 8.6.** The combined Canadian and Greenlandic polar bear annual harvest from the Baffin Bay subpopulation for the period 1992/93 to 2013/14. Annual average proportion of independent female polar bears is shown.

Harvest Season <sup>1</sup>	Total Harvest	Total Allowable Harvest <sup>2</sup>	Harvest (Canada)	Harvest (Greenland) <sup>3</sup>	Proportion Female (Independent bears only)
1992/93	134		62	72	0.35
1993/94	120		60	60	0.35
1994/95	124		60	64	0.35
1995/96	122		55	67	0.35
1996/97	139		60	79	0.38
1997/98	165		69	96	0.36
1998/99	146		49	97	0.36
1999/00	126		58	68	0.37
2000/01	158		61	97	0.33
2001/02	182		64	118	0.33
2002/03	268		62	206	0.32
2003/04	225		69	156	0.32
2004/05	236		101	135	0.36
2005/06	173		94	79	0.30
2006/07	165	178	89	76	0.35
2007/08	176	176	101	75	0.29
2008/09	174	173	103	71	0.36
2009/10	150	171	86	64	0.37
2010/11	165	160	94	71	0.33
2011/12	165	152	90	75	0.35
2012/13	137	142	74	63	0.39
2013/14	146	132	72	74	0.31
Mean	163	161	74.23	89.00	0.35

<sup>1</sup> Greenland harvest data for a given calendar year were included in the harvest season ending in that calendar year

<sup>2</sup> No quota in Greenland prior to 2006 thus total quota only presented for period 2006-2014

<sup>3</sup> Harvest in Greenland is estimated from reported harvest in west Greenland and the estimated portion of this harvest that occurs in Baffin Bay

**Table 8.7.** Genotyping of bears harvested in Canada and Greenland, 2011-2014. Data presented as the percentage of individuals in the reported harvest that were sampled and genotyped. Total number of individuals reported as harvested is presented in parenthesis. Data are organized by Nunavut hunting seasons which run from July1 to June 30.

Subpopulation	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	Canada	Greenland	Canada	Greenland	Canada	Greenland
BB	75 (85)	64 (69)	90 (78)	42 (60)	100 (67)	n/a <sup>1</sup>
DS	74 (38)	-	92 (60)	-	-	-
LS	75 (92)	-	91 (92)	-	-	-
KB	0 (0)	50 (6)	0 (0)	25 (4)	-	-
FB	86 (107)	-	91 (109)	-	-	-
NW	0 (0)	-	33 (3)	-	-	-

<sup>1</sup> Greenland harvest during this season occurred after mark-recapture sampling ceased and is therefore not reported.

**Table 8.8.** Comparison of the reported versus genetic sex of bears harvested in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin, 2011-2014. Data from Canada (Nunavut) and Greenland harvest.

Reported Sex	Genetic Sex	
	Male	Female
Male	156	19
Female	6	97

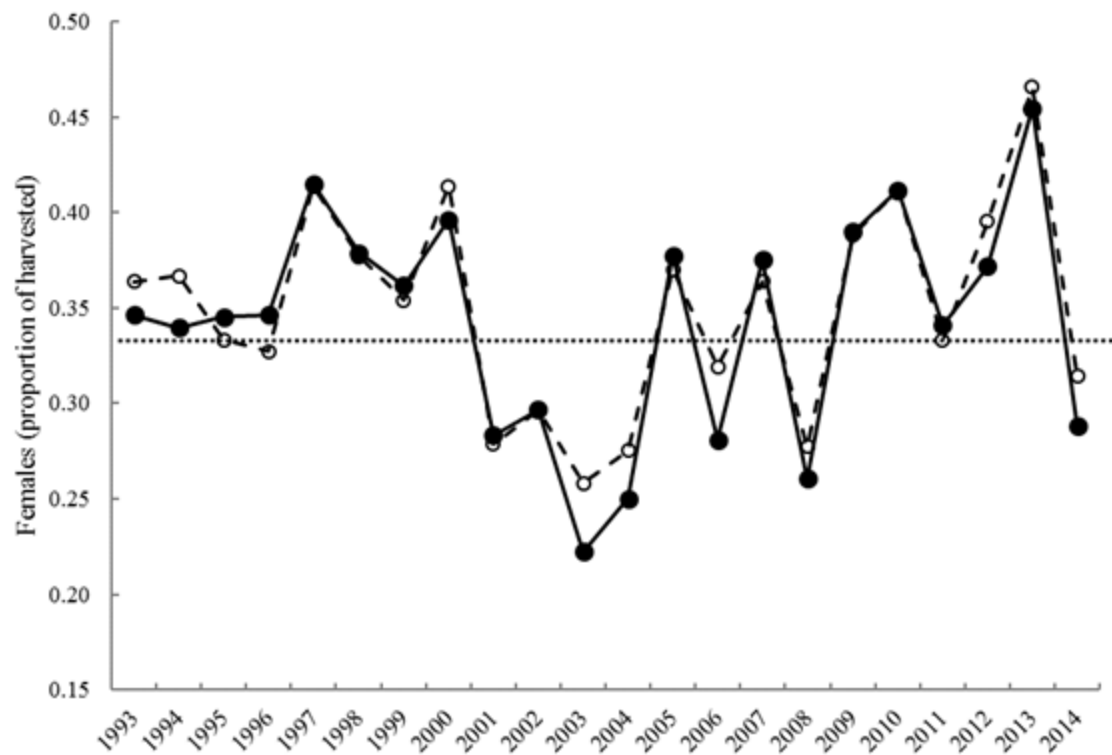
**Table 8.9.** Comparison of the reported versus genetic sex of bears harvested in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin, 2011-2014. Greenland harvest only.

Reported Sex	Genetic Sex	
	Male	Female
Male	29	15
Female	4	24

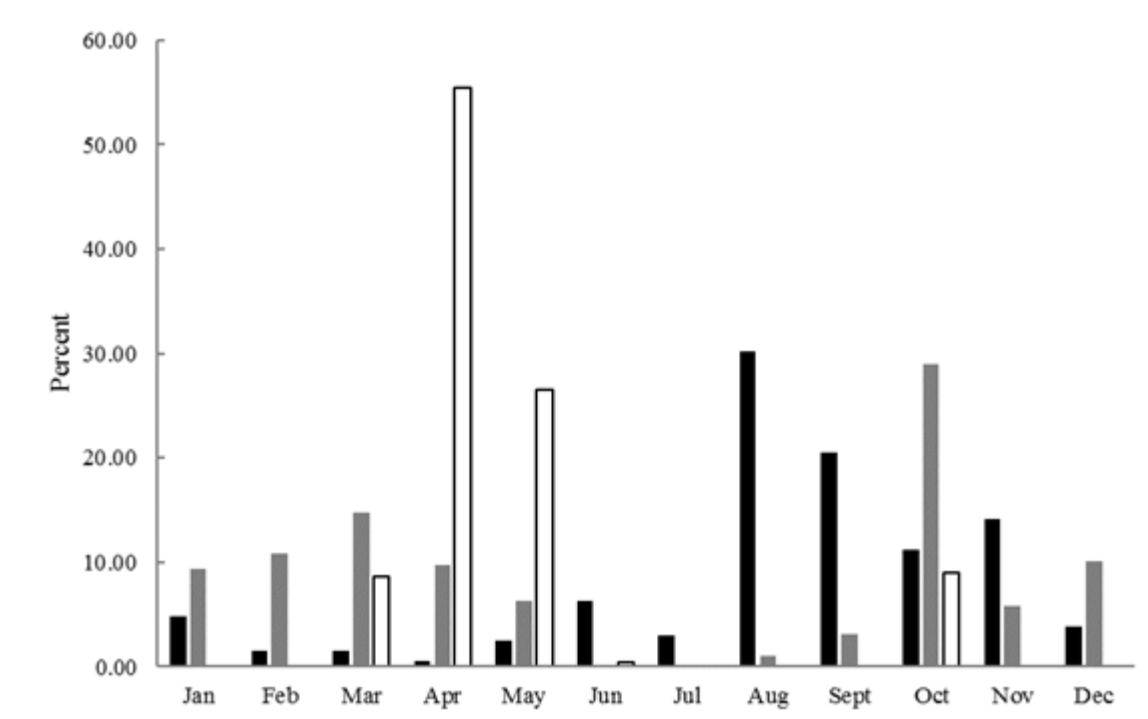
**Table 8.10.** Comparison of the reported versus genetic sex of bears harvested in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin, 2011-2014. Data from Canada (Nunavut) harvest only.

Reported Sex	Genetic Sex	
	Male	Female
Male	127	4
Female	2	73

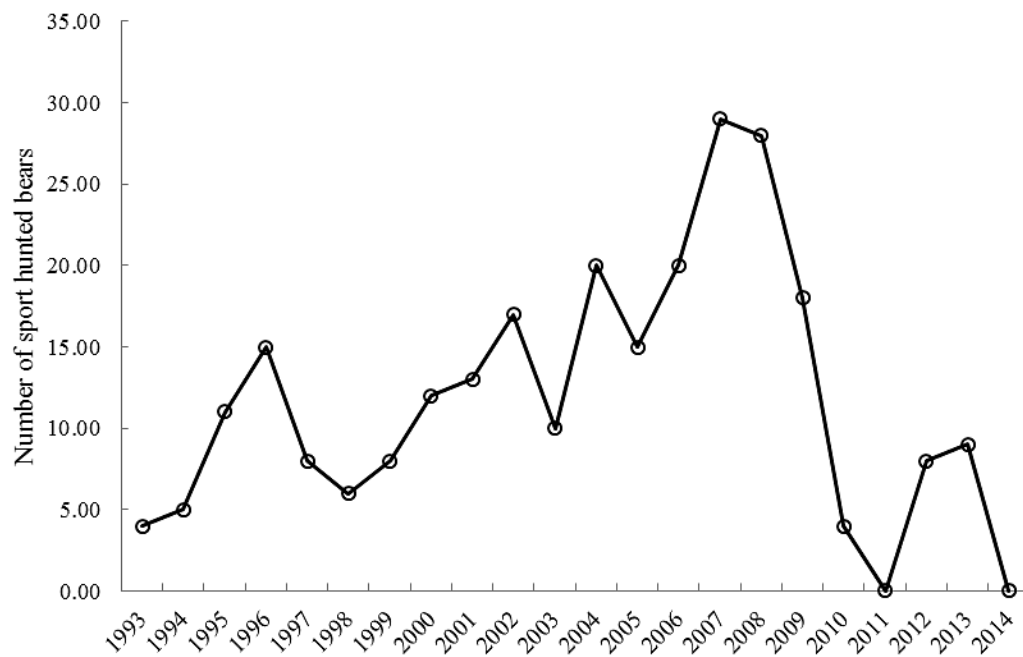




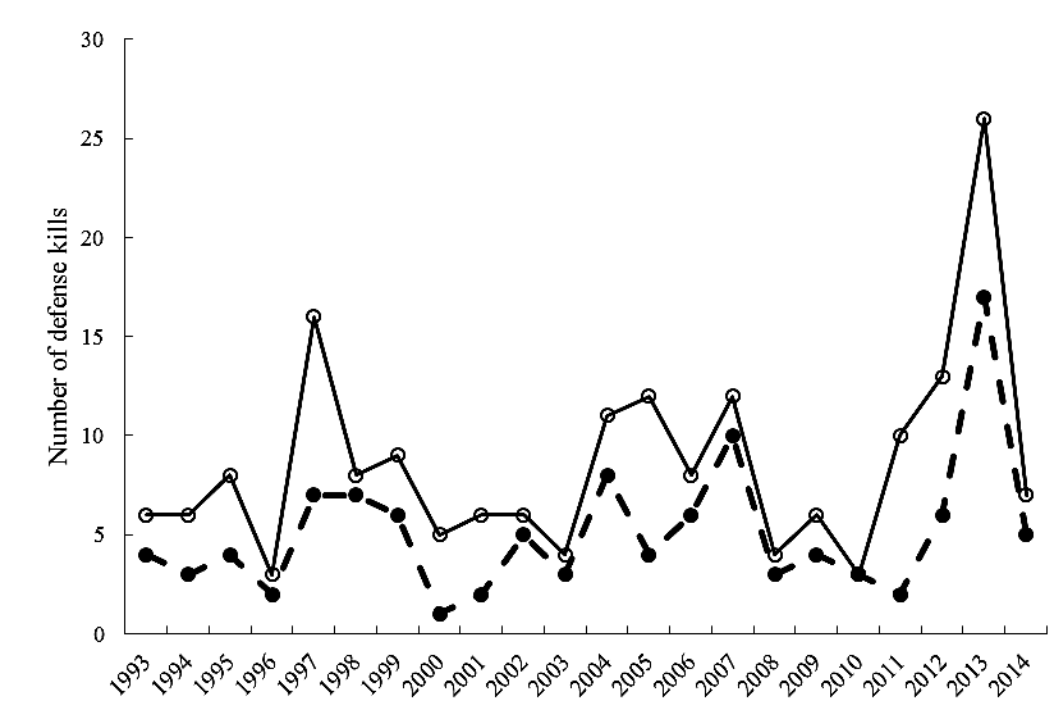
**Figure 8.1.** Harvest of female polar bear as a proportion of total Canadian harvest from Baffin Bay. All females (dashed line) and independent females only (solid line). Dotted line indicates target sex ratio (0.33).



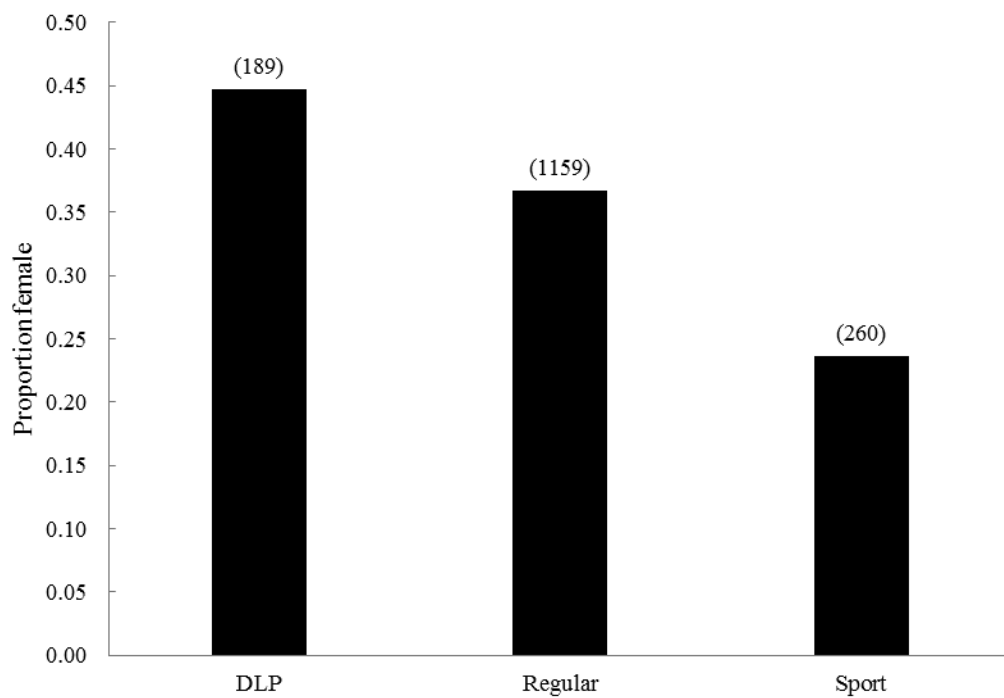
**Figure 8.2.** Monthly distribution of polar bear harvesting in Baffin Bay by type of harvest (1992/93-2013/14). Regular hunts (grey), defense-of-life-and-property kills (black) and sport hunts (white). Bars represent the percentage of hunting of a given type that occurred each month.



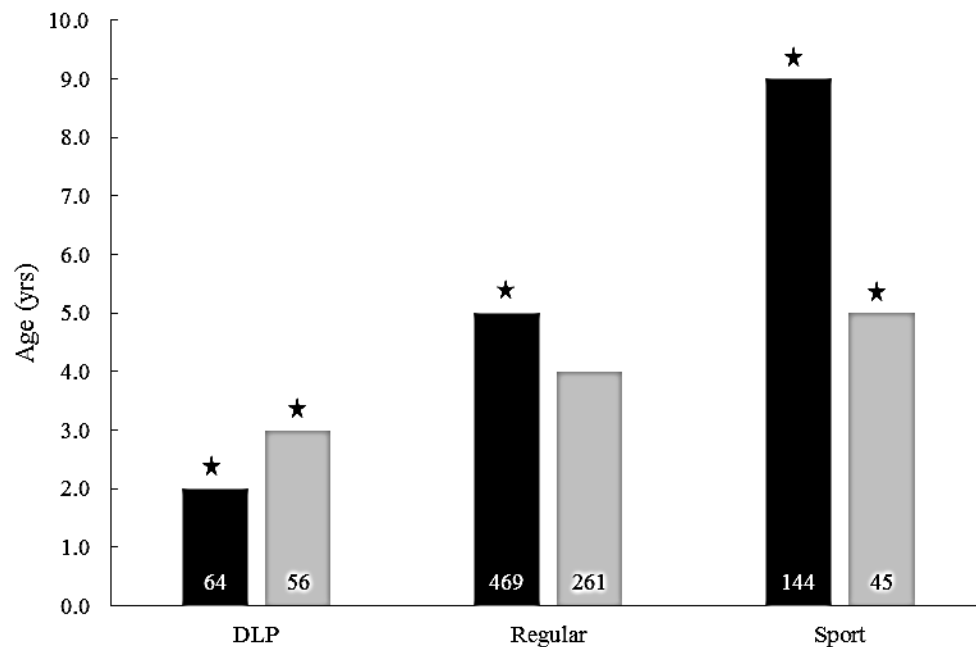
**Figure 8.3.** Numbers of polar bear taken by sport hunters in Baffin Bay, Canada.



**Figure 8.4.** Number of polar bears harvested in defense-of-life-and-property (DLP) in Baffin Bay, Canada. Total DLPs per year (solid line) and DLPs of independent bears during August–November each year (dashed line).

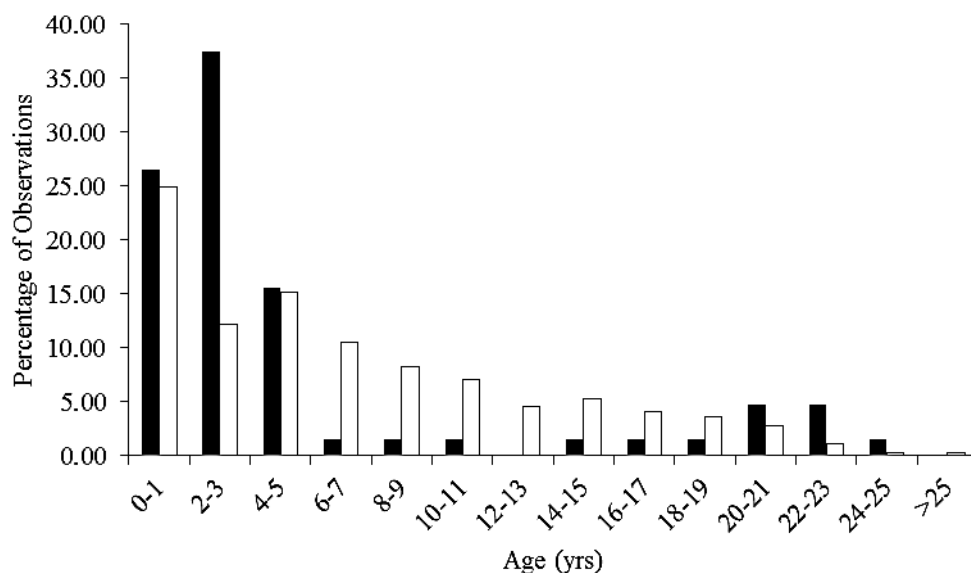


**Figure 8.5.** Sex composition of the three main types of polar bear harvesting in Baffin Bay, Canada, for the period 1992/93 to 2013/14. Bars represent the proportion of harvest that was female. Data are for independent bears only. Sample sizes in parentheses.

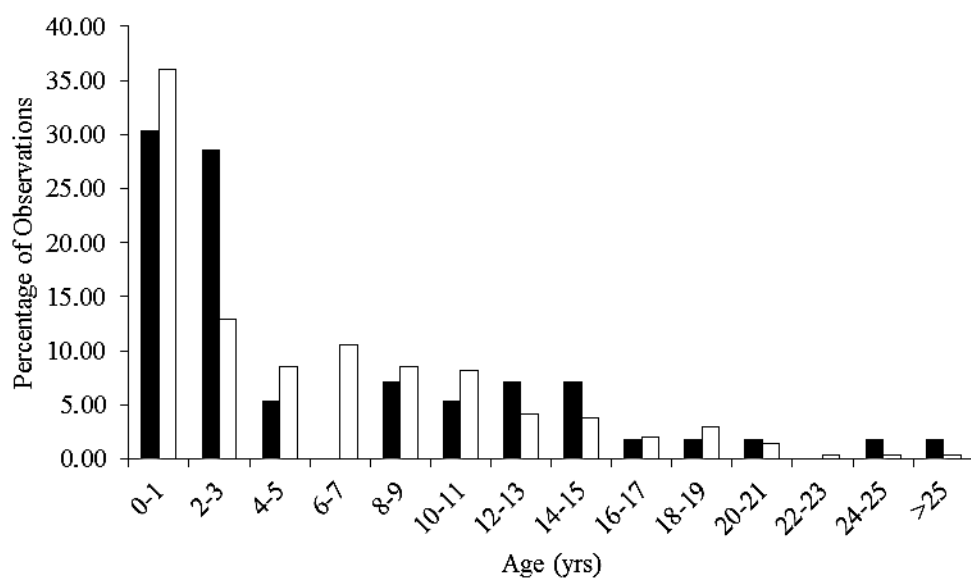


**Figure 8.6.** Median age of male (black) and female (grey) bears harvested for defense-of-life-and-property (DLP), regular (subsistence) and sport hunting purposes in Baffin Bay, Canada, 1993-2010. Within sexes significant differences denoted by \* (Based on Mann-Whitney *U* test with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, two-tailed,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Sample sizes within bars.

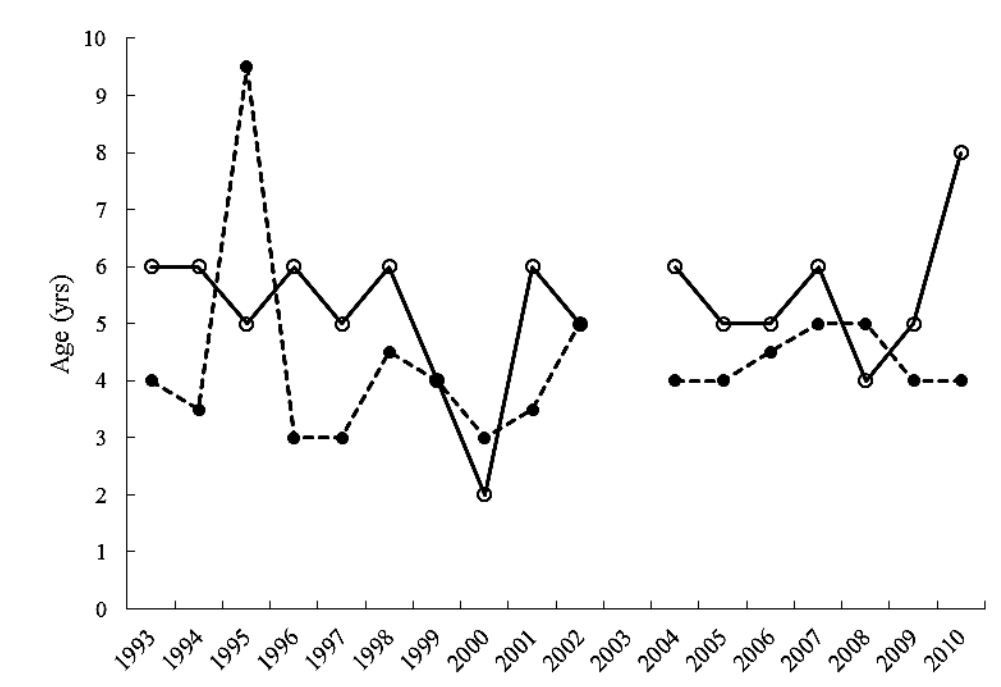
(a)



(b)

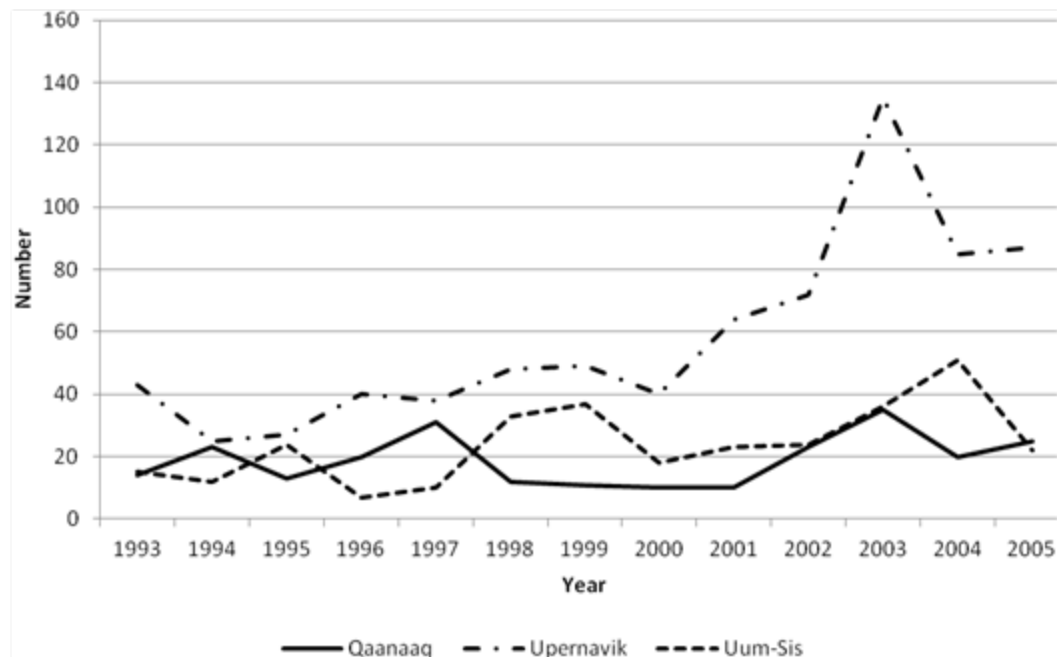


**Figure 8.7.** The age distribution of (a) 64 male and (b) 56 female bears harvested in defense-of-life-and-property (black) in Baffin Bay (Canada), 1993-2010, relative to the age distribution of 778 bears captured during mark-recapture sampling (white), 1993-1997 (GN unpublished data).

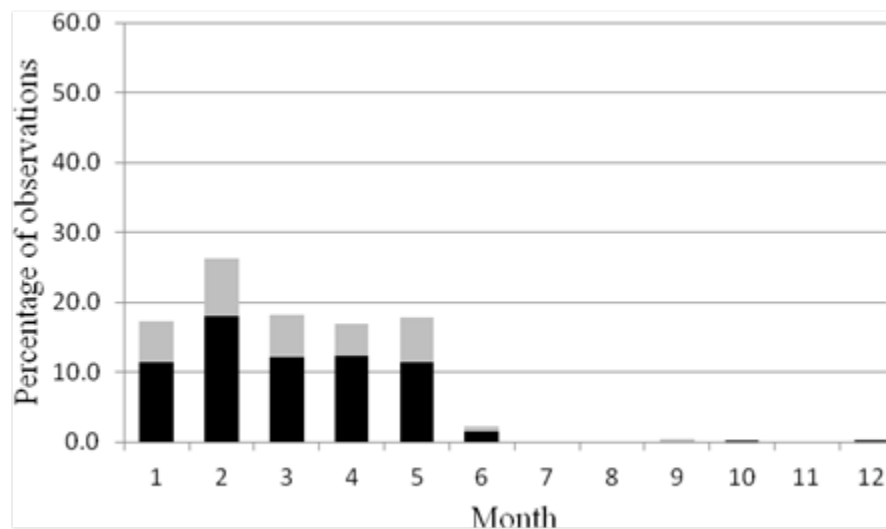


**Figure 8.8.** Median age of harvested male (solid line) and female (dashed line) polar bears in Baffin Bay, Canada. Regular hunts only.

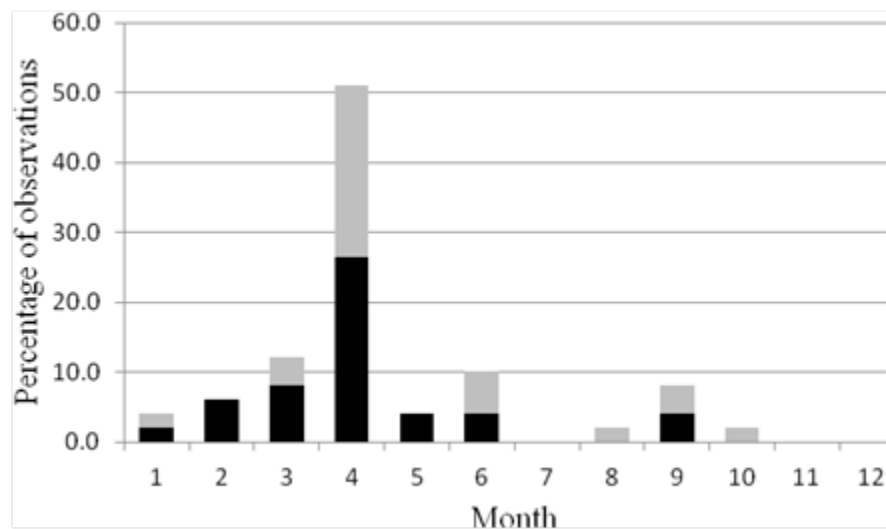




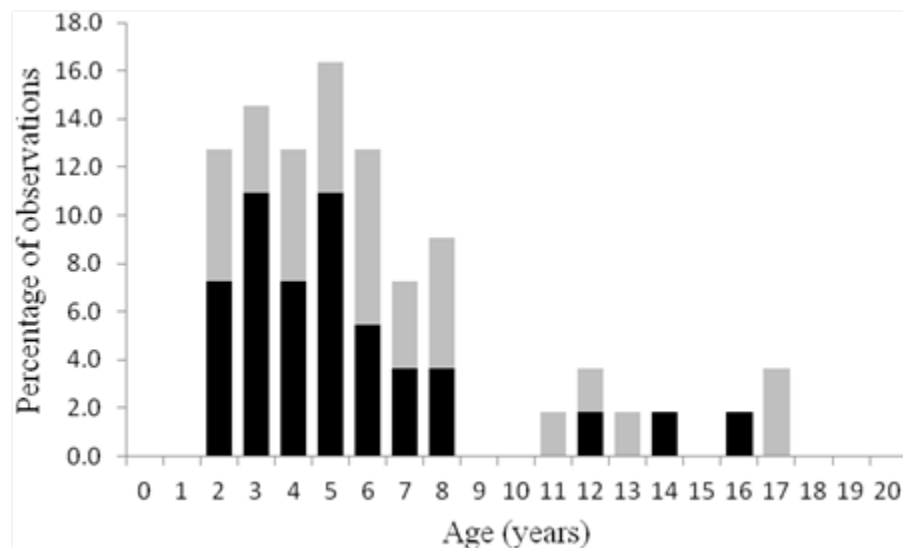
**Figure 8.9.** The Greenland catch of polar bears from the Baffin Bay subpopulation reported in Piniarneq (1993-2005). The catch is shown for three different regions: (1) The Qaanaaq region representing polar bears taken between  $74^{\circ} 35' \text{ N}$  and  $76^{\circ} 20' \text{ N}$  (i.e., the Melville Bay region sensu latu), (2) the Upernavik area between *ca.*  $71^{\circ} 30' \text{ N}$  and  $74^{\circ} 35' \text{ N}$ , and (3) the areas between Uummannaq and Sisimiut between  $66^{\circ} 55' \text{ N}$  and  $71^{\circ} 30' \text{ N}$ .



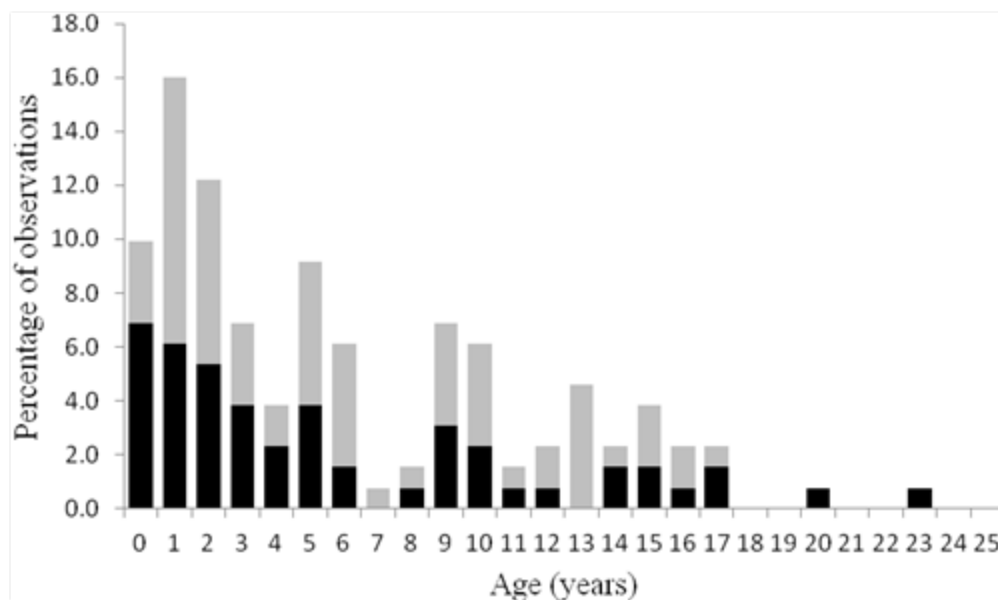
**Figure 8.10.** Seasonal distribution of catches of polar bears ( $n = 594$ ; 587 legal and 7 illegal catches) taken in NW and W Greenland from the Baffin Bay subpopulation based on reports from the licensed hunters (2006-2014). Black = Males. Grey = Females. Source: DFHA (in litt 2014 and 2015).



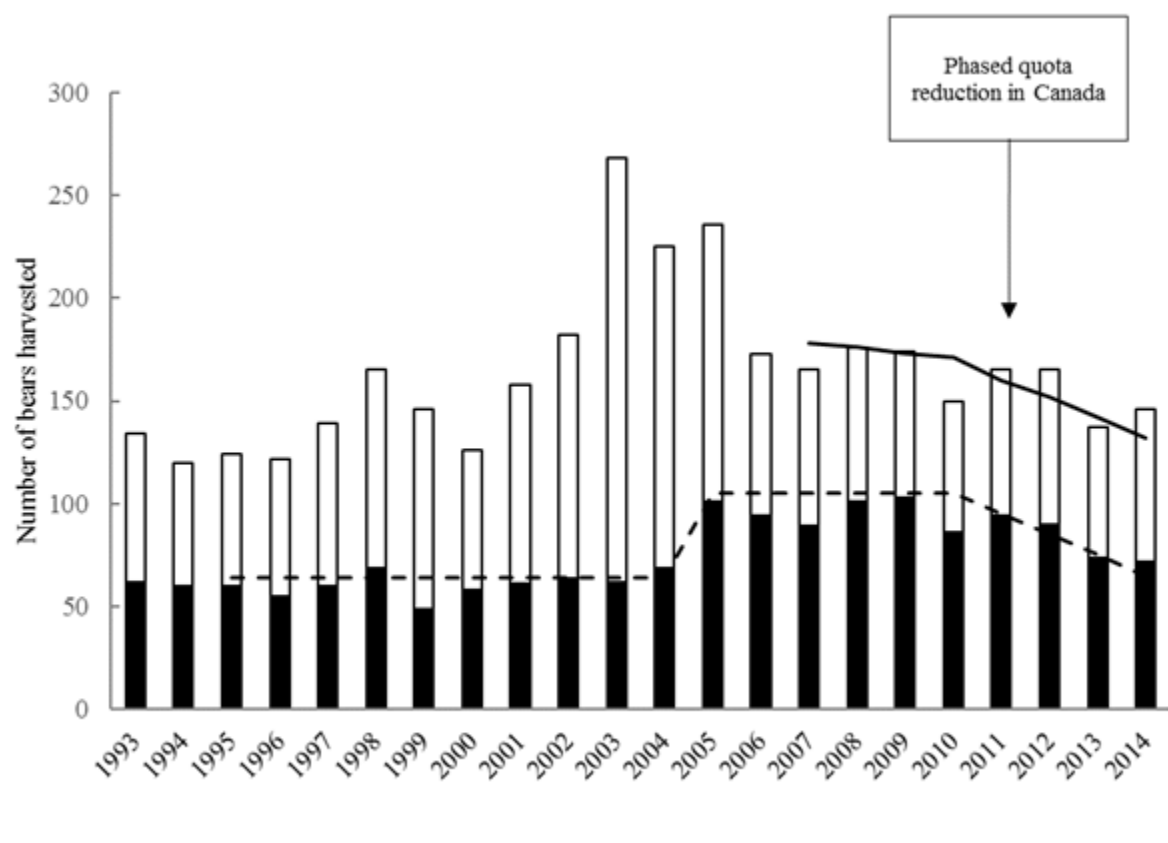
**Figure 8.11.** Seasonal distribution of catches of polar bears ( $n = 49$ ; 48 legal and 1 illegal catches) taken in NW Greenland from the Kane Basin subpopulation based on reports from the licensed hunters (2006-2014). Black = Males. Grey = Females. Source: DFHA (*in litt.* 2014 and 2015).



**Figure 8.12.** Age distribution of a total of 55 polar bears (Grey = Females:  $n = 25$ ; Black = Males:  $n = 30$ ) that were taken from the BB subpopulation by Greenland subsistence hunters in 2012 ( $n = 33$ ) and 2013 ( $n = 22$ ). Sex was determined genetically.

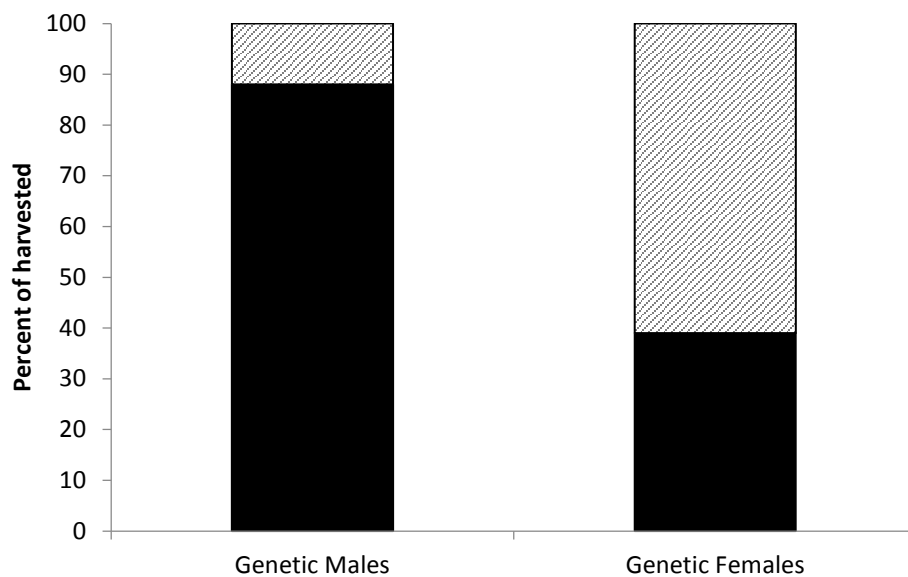


**Figure 8.13.** Age distribution of 131 polar bears (Grey = Females:  $n=73$ ; Black = Males:  $n=58$ ) that were live captured in NW Greenland north of *ca.*  $70^{\circ}$  N from the BB subpopulation during spring 2009-2013 in connection with the present study (GINR unpublished data).

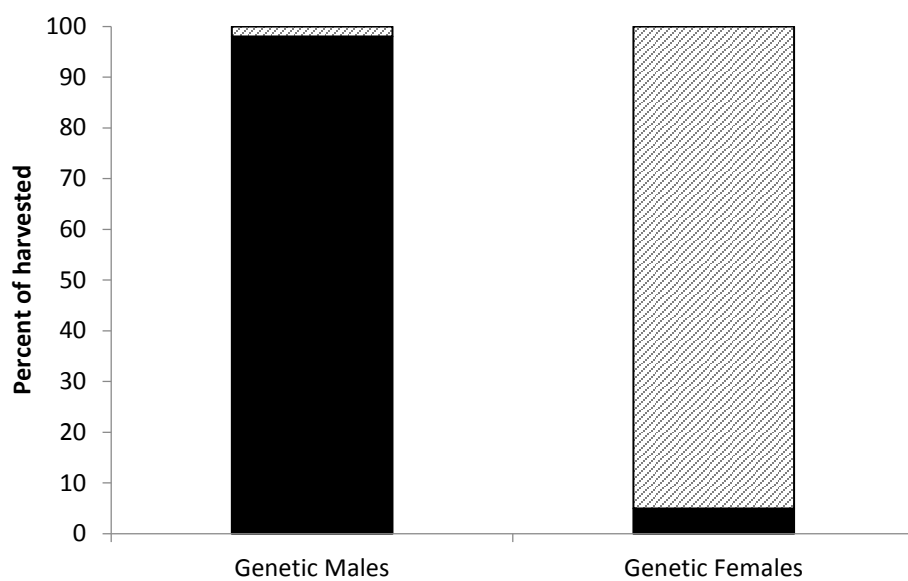


**Figure 8.14.** Combined Canadian (black) and Greenlandic (white) harvest of polar bears from the Baffin Bay subpopulation. Total allowable harvest in Canada (dashed line) and Canada-Greenland combined total permitted harvest (solid line) levels are also shown.

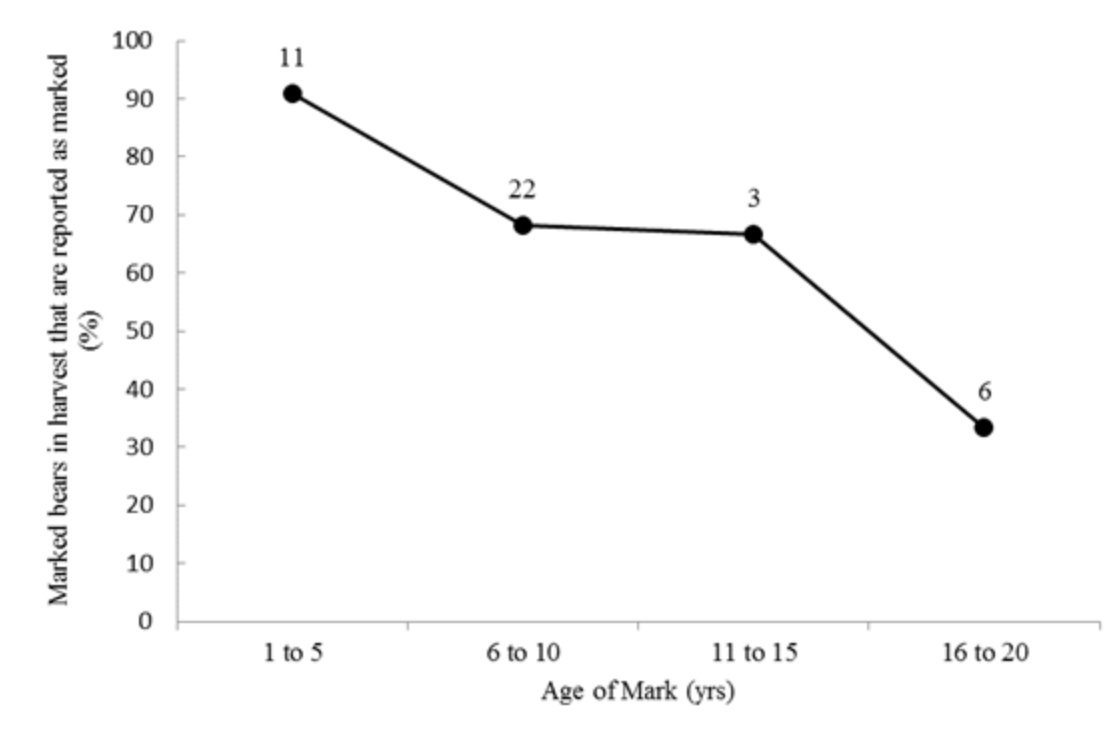
(a)



(b)



**Figure 8.15.** Accuracy of gender reporting for polar bears harvested in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin (2011-14) in (a) Greenland and (b) Nunavut. Bears reported as males and females are indicated in black and hatched, respectively



**Figure 8.16.** Accuracy of reporting of physically marked (tag and tattooed) bears in the harvest in Canada and Greenland. Data are for bears physically marked in Baffin Bay (1990-97) and Davis Strait (2005-07) that were recovered in the harvest 2011-14. Sample sizes above points.



## CHAPTER 9

### HABITAT AND HABITAT USE IN KANE BASIN

#### KEY FINDINGS

- 
- The annual cycle of sea-ice habitat in KB has shifted from a largely year-round ice platform (>30% coverage in summer) to a cycle that resembles the seasonal ice ecoregion with complete melt-out in summer (<5% coverage).
  - Sea ice is retreating earlier in Kane Basin spring by 7 days/decade, and advancing later in fall by 5-6 days/decade and length of summer (number of days from retreat to advance) is increasing by 12 days/decade. The mean sea-ice concentration during June-October is decreasing by 5-6 percent/decade.
  - The KB subpopulation has responded to changing sea-ice conditions with broad movement and habitat use patterns that are more similar to those of bears in seasonal sea-ice ecoregions (e.g., expanded seasonal home ranges, see Chapter 2 and use of lower sea-ice concentrations in summer and fall).
  - Four-day movement rates in KB are lower than those in BB and have a less pronounced seasonal cycle. There are no significant differences in movement rates between the 1990s and 2000s except in October where rates were higher.
  - Land use in KB during summer remains intermittent because some sea ice remains in fjords and coastal areas. No on-land arrival and departure dates could be determined from satellite telemetry.
  - Three maternity dens were found in KB in the 2000s. All were located on Ellesmere Island. There was no significant difference in maternity denning duration, entry dates, or exit dates between the 1990s and 2000s.
  - Overall, the movement (Chapter 2) and habitat results combined with reproductive metrics (Chapter 11) and body condition (Chapter 12), indicate that KB bears are experiencing more seasonal sea-ice ecoregion-like conditions, which since the 1990s may have increased overall biological productivity of the area.
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#### 9.1. Introduction

The Kane Basin (KB) subpopulation of polar bears occurs between the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and Northwest Greenland, referred to by some as the Arctic Archipelago ecoregion, historically characterized by year-round sea-ice habitat in islands in the Canadian High Arctic

and in the Kane Basin region in Northwest Greenland (Hamilton et al. 2014). Ice in this ecoregion is largely multi-year, except in Kane Basin where much of the ice is annual though partially present year-round. In contrast to the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, the Kane Basin region is also characterized and influenced by influx of multi-year ice flowing to the area from the Arctic Ocean. In these areas, sea ice remains along coastal areas in summer providing temporally-stable hunting opportunities for polar bears during summer. This is in contrast to the seasonal ecoregion (Baffin Bay), where sea ice disappears almost completely in summer and bears are forced onshore (Amstrup et al. 2008, this study).

Earlier studies comparing movements and habitat selection of polar bears in the archipelago and seasonal ecoregions documented differences in the influence of sea-ice regimes on movements and habitat use. Ferguson et al. (2000) showed that bears in the archipelago regions (including KB) are strongly influenced by the temporal and spatial distribution of land fast ice around islands providing a consistent habitat across the annual cycle, though possibly lower density year-round prey base. This was in contrast to seasonal ecoregion bears that are strongly influenced by the availability of seasonal sea ice, resulting in a more productive but temporally limited the duration of feeding. Bears in these two ecoregions also demonstrate contrasting movement patterns: bears in the archipelago region (e.g., KB) tended to have smaller home ranges and greater irregularity in movement patterns because they utilize small coastal areas around the complex land masses (or in case of the Kane Basin region fast ice in fjords or fields of pack ice in Nares Strait-Kane Basin), whereas bears in the seasonal sea-ice region (e.g., BB) had large home range sizes (Ferguson et al. 1998) and more regular movement patterns associated with the seasonal growth and recession of sea ice.

Recent work examining Global Climate Model projections of sea-ice habitat for polar bears in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago suggest that conditions will shift towards a seasonal-sea-ice ecoregion before the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hamilton et al. 2014). This shift is expected to initially increase productivity in the archipelago system, as thicker ice is replaced by thinner annual ice increasing production blooms and prey platforms for ice seals. Such a change would be expected to be associated with changes in movement patterns and habitat use similar to that exhibited by bears in the seasonal ecoregion. To date, no studies have quantified such behavioral changes. In this chapter we document changes in sea-ice habitat of KB over the satellite record, and quantify change in habitat use using satellite telemetry data collected from collared adult females in the 1990s and 2000s.

## 9.2. Methods

We refer to “Kane Basin” as the region within the boundaries of the Kane Basin (KB) polar bear management unit (PBSG 2010; Figure 1.1.) that encompasses the northern part of Smith Sound, Nares Strait and Kane Basin and the southern part of Kennedy Channel and adjacent fjords on eastern Ellesmere Island and in NW Greenland.

KB polar bears were captured and tagged between mid-April and early May 2012-2013 (Figure 9.1). Field operations were based out of the Alexandra Fjord station on Ellesmere Island. A total of 34 bears were furnished with satellite-transmitters in KB. Twenty were adult females who received a satellite collar (Table 9.1) and 14 were adult males or subadults (given satellite radio ear tags). Data from adult females were combined with a historical data set from 12 adult females collared between 1992 and 1994 on the west side of KB in the fjords and fast ice (Taylor et al. 2001). Only bears captured within the KB subpopulation boundaries (PBSG 2010) were

included in the analysis. The eastern side of the Kane Basin region was surveyed during 1994-1997 but no female polar bears for collar deployment were found in these areas (Taylor et al. 2001). Hence, radio collars were only deployed on the west side of KB in the 1990s (ibid.). Given the different distribution of collar deployments between decades we tested for differences in area use and mean latitude using only bears captured in West KB in the 2000s and found no differences (see Chapter 2). Therefore, all bears from the 1990s were compared to all bears in the 2000s in habitat models. Bears in all decades largely utilized KB, however in both decades bears moved from KB into BB, LS and in the 2000s out of KB into the Arctic Basin.

### Sea ice

Data sources and methods for sea-ice analysis in KB are the same as those described for BB (see Chapter 4 and Stern and Laidre 2016). The entire KB region, as defined by PBSG (Figure 1.1), was used for the sea-ice habitat analyses. The area was roughly divided into two distinct parts. The northern part, or Kane Basin proper, is bounded on the south by Smith Sound, consisting of almost entirely of shallow (< 300 m) water. The southern part contains the northern part of the North Water Polynya, and is bounded on the south by roughly 77° N latitude where it adjoins northern Baffin Bay. The southern part of Kane Basin consists mostly of deep (> 300 m) water on the Ellesmere Island side and shallow water on the Greenland side.

### Habitat Use Analyses

Methods for KB movement rates, habitat covariates, and multivariate RSF modeling are the same as those described in Chapter 4 for BB. In the multivariate terrestrial RSF we did not include the variable pertaining to the distance to the smoothed Baffin Island coastline. In the

multivariate sea-ice RSF we excluded the covariates representing the distance to the 15 and 50% sea-ice concentration because in some months in KB the distance resulted in unrealistic potential movements of bears.

We attempted to quantify the dates of arrival and departure on land in KB as described for BB in Chapter 4. This analysis was confounded by the fact that KB bears have access to sea ice much of the summer. Thus KB bears used land intermittently and it was not possible to quantify a specific date where bears arrived on shore and did not leave. There were no potential swimming events identified in KB. Maternity denning analyses were conducted with the same methods as described in Chapter 4 for BB.

### 9.3 Results and Discussion

#### Sea-ice habitat

Kane Basin consisted of 81 SSMI sea ice grid cells ( $53 \times 103 \text{ km}^2$ ); 68% had a mean depth  $< 300 \text{ m}$ , 32% had a mean depth  $> 300 \text{ m}$ . The seasonal cycle of the sea ice in KB has changed dramatically since the 1990s (Figure 9.2). In the 1990 sea ice did not disappear from KB and in summer months  $> 50\%$  of KB was ice covered. In the 2000s, there has been greater extent of sea-ice loss and KB reaches  $\sim 5\%$  coverage in summer. The sea-ice loss has been most pronounced from May and through the late fall, and there are few differences in sea-ice coverage between January and April. Trends in the four sea-ice metrics (described in Chapter 4) are provided in Table 9.2. All trends are statistically significant and show a loss of sea-ice habitat. In Kane Basin as a whole, sea ice is retreating earlier in spring by 7 days/decade, and advancing later in fall by 5-6 days/decade (Figure 9.3). The length of summer (number of days from retreat to advance) is increasing by 12 days/decade, and the mean sea-ice concentration during June-

October is decreasing by 5-6 percent/decade (Figure 9.4ab). The trend in the date of spring sea-ice retreat is apparently stronger for the shallow depths of KB than for all depths. The trend in the date of fall sea-ice advance is the same for both depth categories. The downward trend in the June-October sea-ice concentration is apparently stronger for the shallow depths.

The year-to-year variability in sea-ice metrics for Kane Basin was larger than for Baffin Bay, i.e., the scatter about the trend lines was larger. There are several reasons for this variability: (1) the North Water Polynya is an area of dynamic sea-ice activity that affects Kane Basin; (2) there is typically an “ice arch” north of Kane Basin that determines whether ice lingers in the basin (arch intact) or is flushed out (arch collapses); and (3) Baffin Bay is much larger than Kane Basin and so is less affected by such relatively small-scale phenomena as (1) and (2).

The trend in the annual number of ice-covered days in Kane Basin is between  $-5$  and  $-15$  days/decade for most of the areas with shallow depths (Table 9.2). For the southern portion of Kane Basin, the trend is steeper than  $-15$  days/decade on the Greenland side and there is almost no trend on the deeper Ellesmere Island side. Thus, the pattern of extreme sea-ice loss in Baffin Bay along the coast of Greenland (see Chapter 4) extends northward into the southeast portion of Kane Basin.

Spring sea-ice melt in the Kane Basin region begins in May in the North Water Polynya, which generally becomes ice-free by July. Kane Basin proper, to the north, generally holds some sea ice all summer. Figure 4.5 shows that on July 15, Kane Basin proper is almost always ice-covered, often with 50% or more sea-ice concentration. The year 2009 was exceptional, when all the ice in Kane Basin was swept out in May and June. In October, sea ice advances from north to south through Kane Basin, but the date of advance is generally trending later (Table 9.2 and Figure 9.2).

*Movement rates* – In Kane Basin, mean monthly movement rates for adult females were overall lower than in Baffin Bay. In KB in the 1990s, mean monthly movement rates ranged from a low of 3.4 km/day (in August) to a high of 9.4 km/day (in February) (Figure 9.5, Table 9.3). Rates for adult females in the 2000s were similar and ranged from 4.7 km/day (in September) to 6.94 km/day (in November) (Figure 9.5, Table 9.3). Compared to Baffin Bay, there was a substantially less pronounced cycle to movement rates over the year in KB. There were no significant differences in movement rates between decades except in October in the 2000s where rates were higher than the 1990s (Table 9.3).

*RSF sea-ice models* – The sample sizes of adult females in KB in the 1990s and 2000s were smaller than in BB (12 and 20 bears, respectively). Collars deployed between 2012 and 2013 were removed in April 2014 thus tracking durations in the later period were also shorter. We examined univariate relationships for multiple habitat covariates over the annual cycle of sea ice (Figure 9.7 and 9.8). KB bears in the 1990 used similar sea-ice concentrations as bears in the 2000s between January and May (Figure 9.7). Starting in late spring (June) and continuing through December, KB bears in the 2000s used significantly lower sea-ice concentrations than in the 1990s. This was most pronounced in August-October. Distances from bears to the 15% or 50% sea-ice concentration thresholds varied widely across the annual cycle and were similar between decades, though in the 2000s bears were significantly closer to the 50% sea-ice edge in March and April. There were no large differences in bears' distance to land in either decade, other than bears being closer to land from October-December in the 2000s.

The multivariate RSF model in winter demonstrated adult female polar bears in the 1990s had a strong preference for higher ice concentrations. This preference was not present in the

2000s. In both decades bears had a similar strength of preference for the distance to the 300 m depth contour and preferred shallower depths (more strongly and significantly in the 2000s) (Table 9.4). The multivariate RSF model for spring showed that bears also had a strong significant preference for higher ice concentrations in the 1990s (Table 9.5). The preference was reduced in the 2000s but there was no significant difference between decades. In spring in the 1990s, bears were farther from the shelf break (300 m contour), whereas in the 2000s they were closer to 300 m and this change was significant between decades. There was no preference for depth in either decade in spring. In both decades, there was a preference not to move to land, but this was significantly stronger in the 2000s.

*RSF terrestrial models* – Adult female use of land was intermittent in KB, thus land use models reflect use of land largely near the shoreline as bears moved on and off sea ice (Figure 9.9, Figure 9.10). The terrestrial models demonstrated that KB bears preferred lower elevations, a preference which has significantly increased in the 2000s. Bears tend to avoid steep slopes in both decades and were significantly less likely to move to sea ice once they were on land (Table 9.6).

*Arrival and departure dates* – KB is part of the Archipelago ecoregion, which in contrast to the seasonal ice ecoregion, historically does not melt out completely each year. Bears in KB exhibit fundamental differences in their habitat use because of the availability of sea ice between systems. In general, KB bears had access to sea ice for most of the summer, especially in the 1990s though this has been significantly reduced in the 2000s. Some bears utilized fjord ice for most of the summer and never arrived on land, while others spent intermittent time on land. Overall patterns of land use among individuals were not consistent and thus it was not possible to quantify on-land arrival and departure dates. No long-distance swimming events were observed,



though one of the swimming events recorded for BB in July 2010 resulted in a BB collared bear arriving on Ellesmere Island after a long distance swim from offshore pack ice in Northern BB.

*Kane Basin denning* – Nine dens were found from 2012 to 2015 in KB: three maternity dens (Figure 9.11) and six shelter dens (Figure 9.12). In the 1990s data, Ferguson et al. (1997) also found nine dens, of which three were maternity dens and six were shelter dens (Table 9.7). All dens were on land with the exception of one 1990s shelter den that was located on landfast ice nine kilometers from the shore of Ellesmere Island. Most of the dens were located on Ellesmere Island except for three dens on Devon Island. None of the adult females from KB denned on Greenland. The minimum latitude for the 1990s dens was 77.94° N, and 77.04° N for the 2000s dens.

There was no significant difference in maternity denning duration ( $p = 1$ ) (Table 9.8, Figure 9.13), entry dates ( $P = 0.6$ ) and exit dates ( $P = 1$ ) (Figure 9.14). Only four of the KB bears in the 2000s provided useable temperature data for inferring exit dates and no temperature data were available from the 1990s. There was no significant correlation between latitude and maternity den entry dates ( $\tau = 0.138$ ,  $P = 0.848$ ) or duration ( $\tau = 0.2$ ,  $P = 0.707$ ). The median first date on land for the  $n=3$  pregnant females in the 1990s was 18 September (SD = 31 days) and in the 2000s was 23 August (SD = 20.8 days; Figure 9.15). The difference between the two time periods was not significant despite the median FDOLs being 27 days apart. The sample size was small and there was considerable variability. Habitat characteristics among maternity dens did not significantly differ between decades (Figure 9.16; Table 9.9, 9.10).

#### 9.4. Literature Cited

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**Table 9.1.** Breakdown of adult females (AF) collared in the Kane Basin region in the 1990s and 2000s. AF = adult female, AM = adult male, COY = Cub of the Year, YRL = Yearling, 2YR = 2 Year old cub.

		<b>AF alone</b>	<b>AF+AM</b>	<b>AF+COY</b>	<b>AF+YRL</b>	<b>AF+2YR</b>	<b>Sum</b>
1990s	KB	3	0	5	3	1	12
2000s	KB	5	1	7	3	4	20

**Table 9.2.** Trends in date of spring sea-ice retreat, fall sea-ice advance, fall – spring dates, and summer (June-Oct) sea-ice concentration in Kane Basin (all depths, and depths < 300 m). All trends are statistically significant at the 99% level according to a 2-sided F test, except the date of spring retreat (all depths), which is significant at the 95% level.

	<b>Trend in date of spring ice retreat (days/decade)</b>	<b>Trend in date of fall ice advance (days/decade)</b>	<b>Trend in fall – spring (days/decade)</b>	<b>Trend in ice con. June- October (percent/decade)</b>
<b>Baffin Bay region</b>				
All depths	–6.8	+5.6	+12.4	–5.4
Depths < 300 m	–9.7	+5.5	+15.2	–6.9

**Table 9.3.** Mean monthly movement rates in KB for radio-collared adult female polar bears

(AFs) in the 1990s and 2000s. One SE about the mean is given. We conducted a parametric test of significance between decades; bold = significant at the 5% level.

Month	Mean	SE	N	N	Mean	SE	N	N	t-test P
	1990s	1990s	1990s	steps	2000s	2000s	2000s	steps	value
1	3.62	3.78	5	21	4.87	7.59	12	98	0.8691
2	9.39	9.74	4	16	5.9	6.99	11	93	0.4504
3	8.52	9.17	7	35	5.63	6.73	13	117	0.3802
4	5.79	7.28	13	80	5.66	6.57	13	138	0.5197
5	7.35	10.19	12	92	6.75	5.87	21	230	0.6035
6	5.31	7.2	12	85	5.22	4.47	18	193	0.6012
7	3.6	3.19	11	81	5.75	4.13	14	166	0.1011
8	3.41	3.45	10	62	4.84	4.66	14	132	0.5136
9	3.91	5.9	10	63	4.5	4.57	14	132	0.1466
10	4	3.07	9	51	6.42	7.1	14	141	<b>0.0394</b>
11	7.87	8.96	9	40	6.94	6.57	13	118	0.986
12	7.87	8.82	8	36	4.68	5.22	12	116	0.3835

**Table 9.4.** Sea-ice resource selection function (RSF) model coefficients for the Winter season in KB using CLOGIT. The P-value delta is for the interaction between the 1990s to the 2000s for each covariate within the multivariate model. Coefficients are scaled such by a certain number of units for more meaningful interpretation. “Mean ice conc.10” is the mean sea-ice concentration around the bear in a circular radius scaled by 10%. “Dist to 50%” is the distance to the 50% sea-ice concentration scaled by 100 km. “Dist to 300 m” is the distance to the 300 m depth contour scaled by units of 100 m. “Depth.100” is the absolute value of bathymetry scaled by 100 m. “Land” is the variable that describes the tendency of a bear to move from sea ice on to land.

	<b>1990s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>2000s</b>		<b>p-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>1990s</b>	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>2000s</b>	<b>delta</b>
Mean ice conc.10	0.479	0.564	0.3963	0.074	0.192	0.699	0.4976
Dist to 50%.100	-0.014	0.134	0.918	-0.032	0.115	0.7823	0.9181
Dist to 300 m.100	1.82	0.824	0.0272	1.738	0.826	0.0353	0.9436
Depth.100	-0.034	0.078	0.6579	-0.065	0.084	0.4387	0.7892
Land	3.377	4.895	0.4903	1.108	1.504	0.4615	0.6577

**Table 9.5.** Sea-ice resource selection function (RSF) model coefficients for the Spring season in KB using CLOGIT. The P-value delta is for the interaction between the 1990s to the 2000s for each covariate within the multivariate model. Coefficients are scaled such by a certain number of units for more meaningful interpretation. “Mean ice conc.10” is the mean sea-ice concentration around the bear in a circular radius scaled by 10%. “Dist to 50%” is the distance to the 50% sea-ice concentration scaled by 100 km. “Dist to 300 m” is the distance to the 300 m depth contour scaled by units of 100 m. “Depth.100” is the absolute value of bathymetry scaled by 100 m. “Land” is the variable that describes the tendency of a bear to move from sea ice on to land. Bold = significant at the 5% level.

	<b>1990s</b>		<b>P-value</b>	<b>2000s</b>		<b>P-value</b>	<b>P-value</b>
	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>1990s</b>	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>2000s</b>	<b>delta</b>
Mean ice conc.10	0.255	0.062	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	0.223	0.058	<b>0.0001</b>	0.7107
Dist to 50%.100	-0.007	0.051	0.8867	-0.118	0.071	0.0949	0.2031
Dist to 300 m.100	1.324	0.502	<b>0.0084</b>	-0.997	0.483	<b>0.0392</b>	<0.001
Depth.100	-0.159	0.043	<b>0.0002</b>	-0.102	0.051	<b>0.0451</b>	0.4
Land	-0.349	0.476	0.4639	-0.588	0.469	0.2107	0.7208

**Table 9.6.** Terrestrial resource selection function (RSF) model coefficients for the Summer season in KB using CLOGIT. The P-value delta is for the interaction between the 1990s to the 2000s for each covariate within the multivariate model. Coefficients are scaled such by a certain number of units for more meaningful interpretation. “Elev.100” is elevation scaled by units of 100 m. “Slope.10” is slope in degrees scaled by units of 10 degrees. “Aspect.10” is aspect scaled by units of 10 degrees. “Not Land” is the tendency of a bear to move from land on to sea ice. Note not all bears used land in summer and land-use was intermittent. Bold = significant at the 5% level.

	<b>1990s</b>		<b>P-value</b>		<b>2000s</b>		<b>P-value</b>		<b>P-value</b>
	<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>1990s</b>		<b>coef</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>2000s</b>		<b>delta</b>
elev.100	-0.452	0.07	<b>&lt;0.001</b>		-0.74	0.054	<b>&lt;0.001</b>		0.001
slope.10	0.256	0.136	0.0594		0.316	0.07	<b>&lt;0.001</b>		0.692
aspect.10	-0.019	0.013	0.1621		0.007	0.007	0.3166		0.088
NotLand	-0.443	0.317	0.1619		-1.186	0.166	<b>&lt;0.001</b>		0.03



**Table 9.7.** Number of polar bear maternity and shelter dens in Kane Basin in the 1990s and 2000s.

All Dens		Maternity Dens		Shelter Dens	
1990s	9	1990s	3	1990s	6
2000s	9	2000s	3	2000s	6
Total	18	Total	6	Total	12

**Table 9.8.** Summary table of the phenology for Kane Basin polar bear maternity dens.

	<b>1990s</b>			<b>2000s</b>		
	<b>Maternity Dens (<math>n = 3</math>)</b>			<b>Maternity Dens (<math>n = 3</math>)</b>		
	Entry DOY	Exit DOY	Duration (# days)	Entry DOY	Exit DOY	Duration (# days)
Mean	279	78.3	164.3	274	77.7	168.7
Min	274	69	145	252	65	144
Max	289	89	180	301	88	184
Median	274	77	168	269	80	178
SD	8.7	10.1	17.8	24.9	11.7	21.6

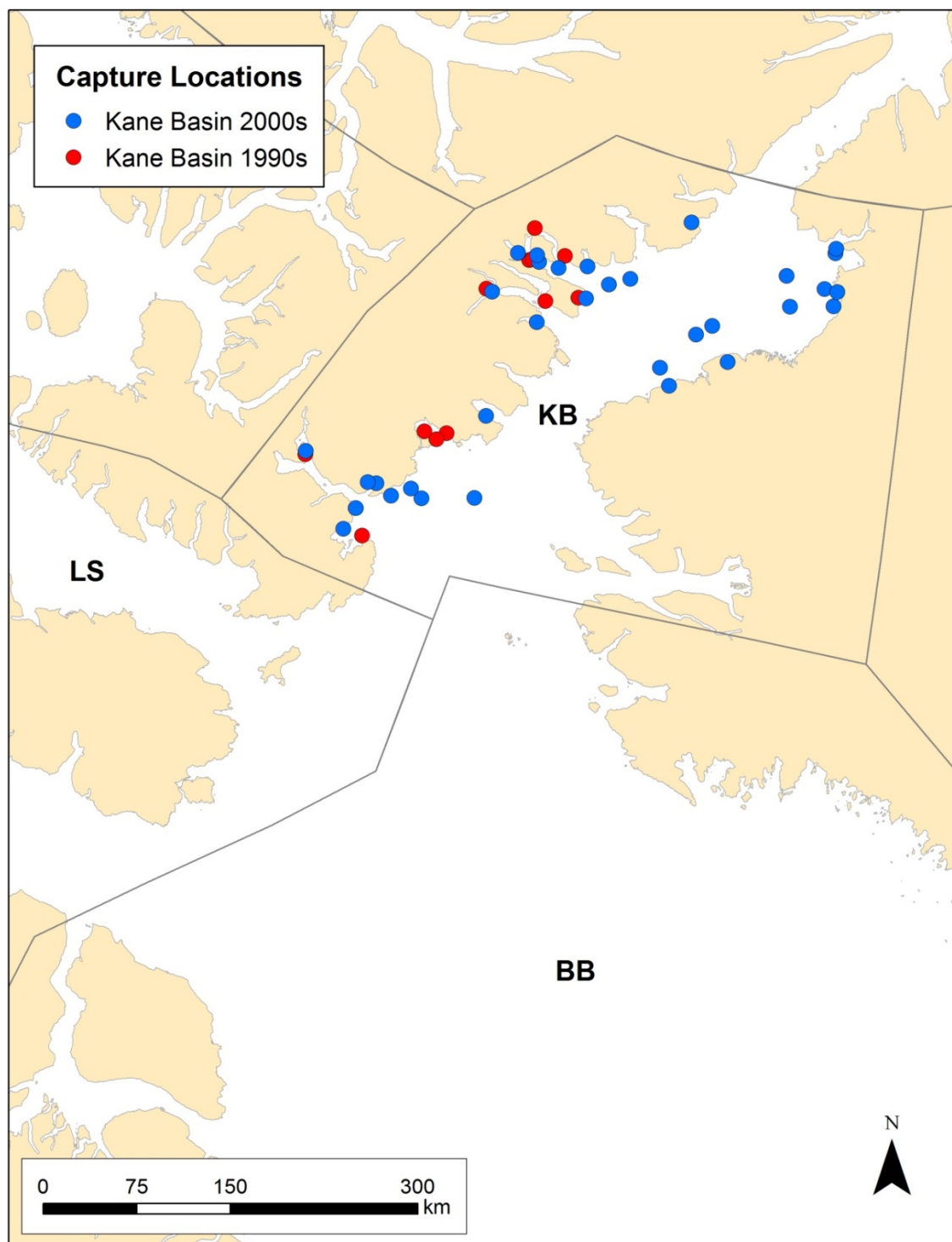
**Table 9.9.** Summary table of the habitat characteristics for Kane Basin polar bear maternity and shelter dens. Elev. = elevation (meters), Asp. = aspect (degrees), CoastDist = distance to nearest coastline (kilometers).

<b>All Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 6)</b>					<b>All Shelter Dens (<i>n</i> = 12)</b>			
	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)
Mean	327	165.8	13.4	5.2	366.6	141.8	15.4	3.4
Min	9	28.3	3.7	0.7	6	5.5	1.8	0.1
Max	506	229	17.8	12.5	855	350	36.9	8
Median	408	186.8	15.9	3.4	318	168.3	12	2.8
SD	188.4	69.8	5.4	4.8	274.8	126.3	10.8	2.4
<b>1990s Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 3)</b>					<b>1990s Shelter Dens (<i>n</i> = 6)</b>			
	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)
Mean	207.7	201	11.9	2.1	386.7	134	12.9	2.6
Min	9	185.9	3.7	0.7	6	12	1.8	0.1
Max	422	229	16.1	4.3	855	349.7	36.9	5.5
Median	192	188.1	15.8	1.2	257	105.7	9.9	2.3
SD	206.9	24.3	7.1	1.9	378.5	137.4	12.4	2.1
<b>2000s Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 3)</b>					<b>2000s Shelter Dens (<i>n</i> = 6)</b>			
	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)	Elev. (m)	Asp. (°)	Slope (°)	CoastDist (km)
Mean	446.3	130.6	15	8.3	346.5	149.5	17.9	4.2
Min	394	28.3	10.7	2.6	149	5.5	7.2	1.6
Max	506	187.7	17.8	12.5	500	350	32.5	8
Median	439	175.9	16.5	9.7	355.5	168.3	16.4	4.1
SD	56.4	88.8	3.8	5.1	148.2	126.7	9.3	2.5

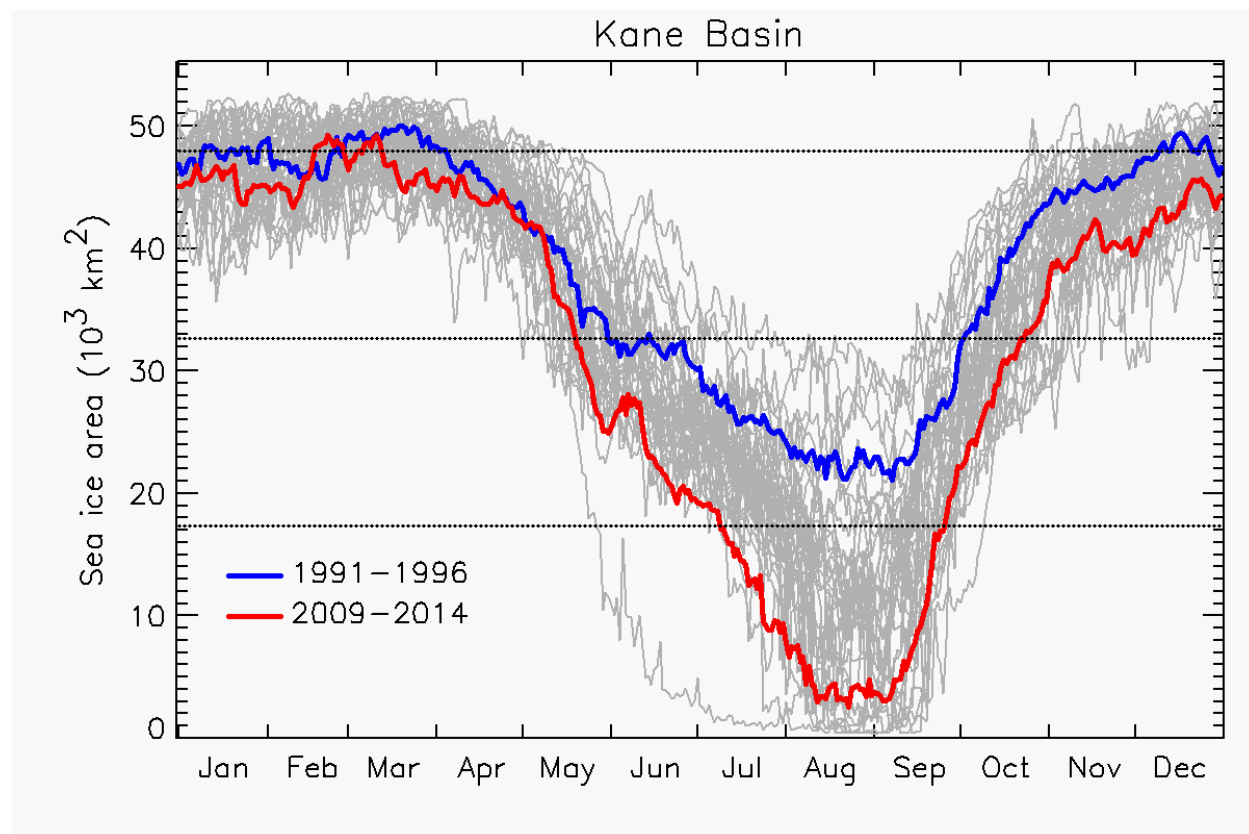
**Table 9.10.** Results of the two-sample Mann-Whitney U tests comparing habitat characteristics for Kane Basin polar bear maternity and shelter dens.

	<b>Maternity Dens (<i>n</i> = 6)</b>		<b>Shelter Dens (<i>n</i> = 12)</b>	
	<b>W</b>	<b><i>p</i>-value</b>	<b>W</b>	<b><i>p</i>-value</b>
Elevation	8	0.2	20	0.818
Slope	7	0.4	25	0.31
Aspect	1	0.2	17	0.937
Distance to Coast	8	0.2	24	0.394

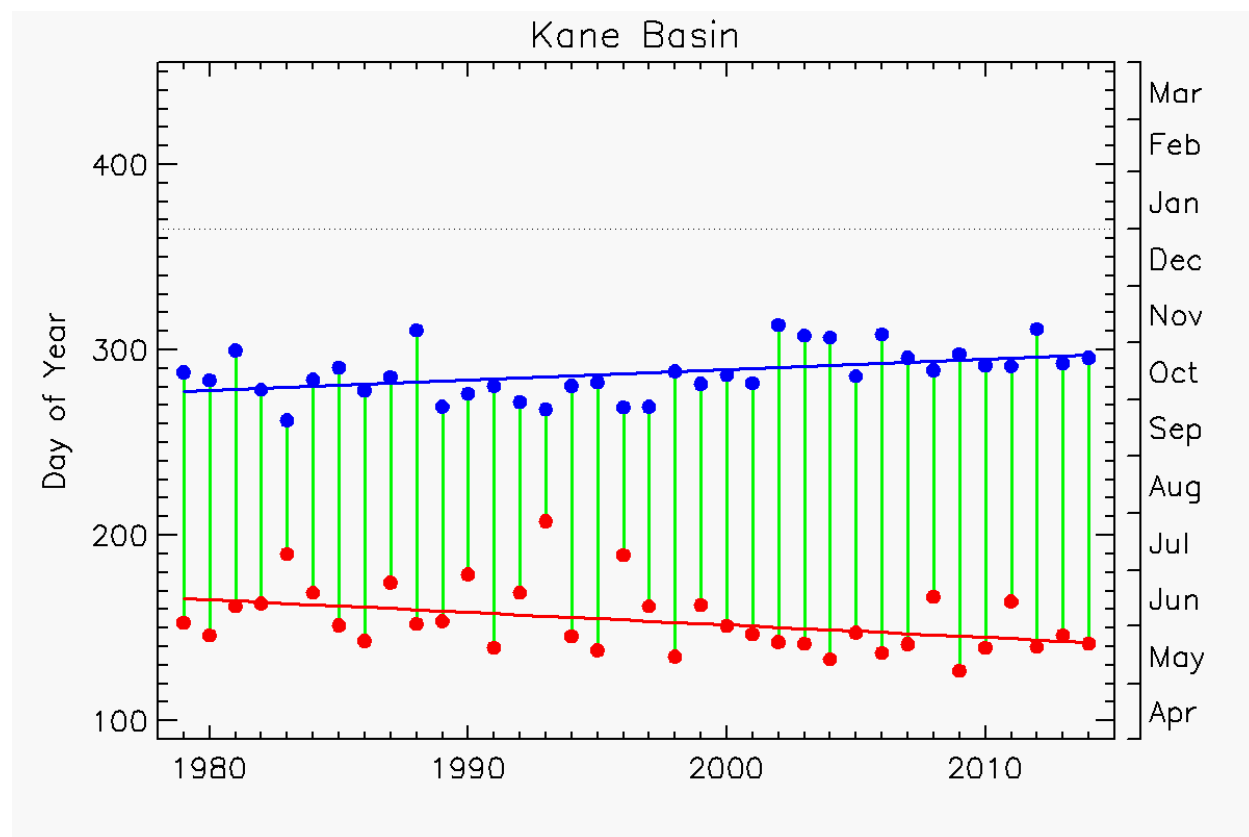
**Figure 9.1.** Distribution of capture locations for polar bears in Kane Basin (KB) in each decade. See Table 9.1 for sample sizes in each year. Note in 1990s bears in KB were captured on the west side of KB whereas 2000s bears were captured on both the east and west side.



**Figure 9.2** Sea-ice area in Kane Basin (all depths) for the years 1979-2014 (gray curves). Two six-year averages are also shown (colored curves). The threshold for defining the dates of sea-ice retreat and advance (middle horizontal dotted line) is halfway between the average March sea-ice area (upper dotted line) and the average September sea-ice area (lower dotted line).

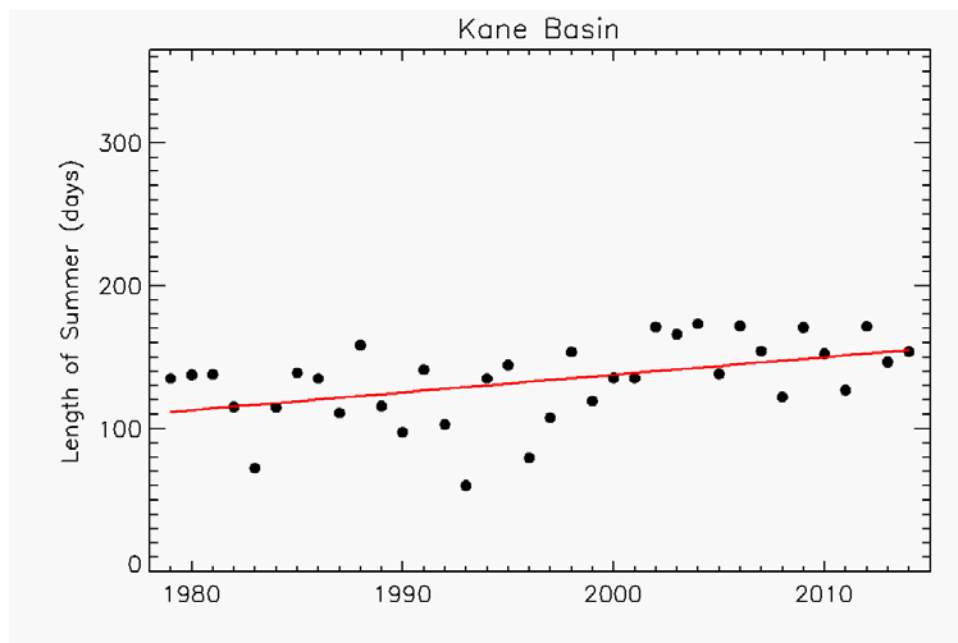


**Figure 9.3** Day of spring sea-ice retreat (red circles), fall sea-ice advance (blue circles), and the interval between them (green lines), for Kane Basin (all depths), 1979-2014. Least-squares fits to spring and fall dates are shown (red and blue lines). Trends are given in Table 9.2.

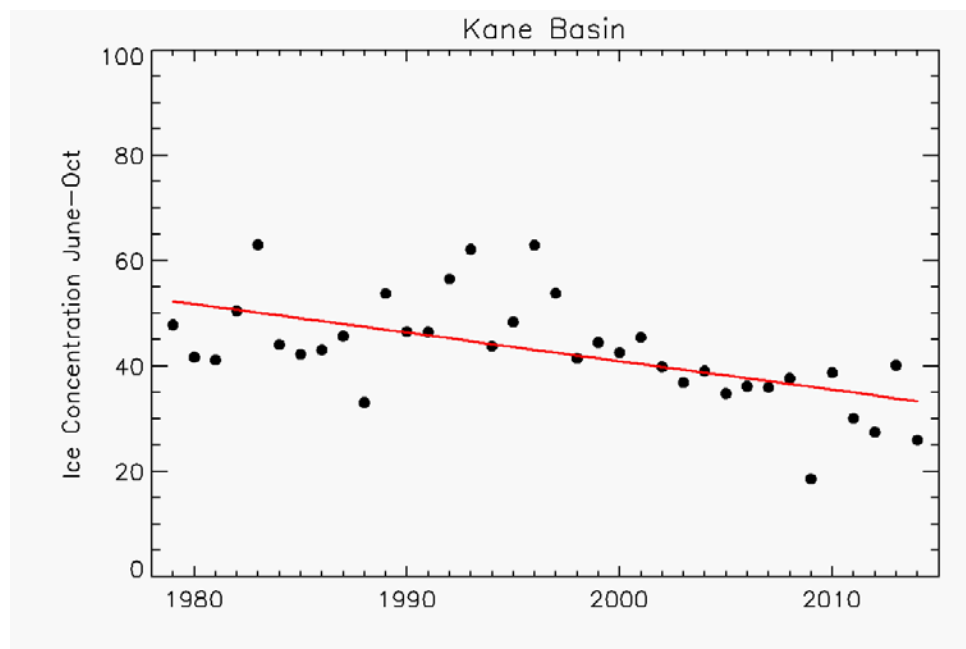


**Figure 9.4.** Length of summer (a) and mean sea-ice concentration during June-October (b) for Kane Basin (all depths), 1979-2014. Length of summer is the interval from spring sea-ice retreat to fall sea-ice advance (see Figure 9.2, green lines). Least-squares fits are shown (red lines); trends are given in Table 9.2.

(a)

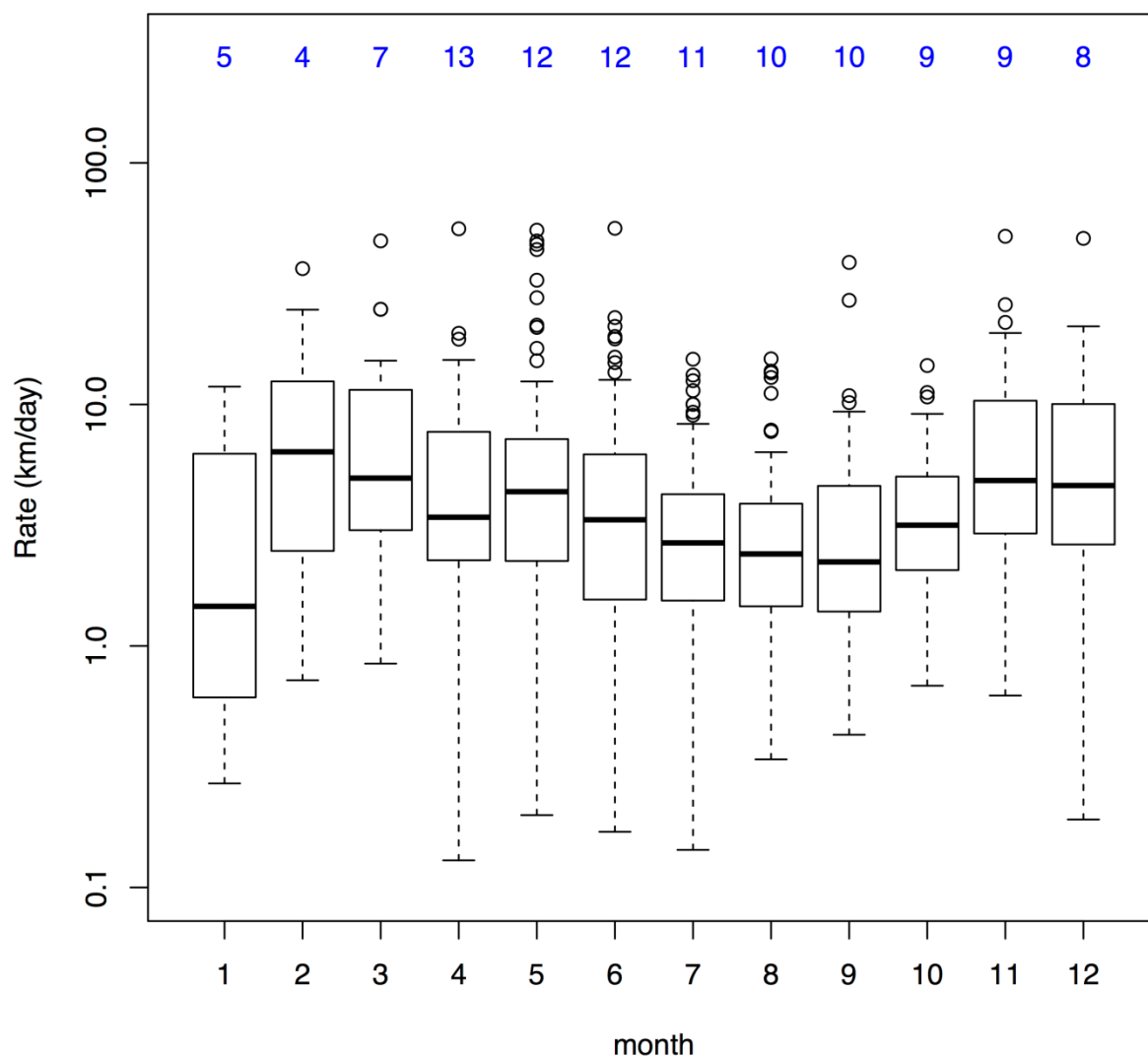


(b)

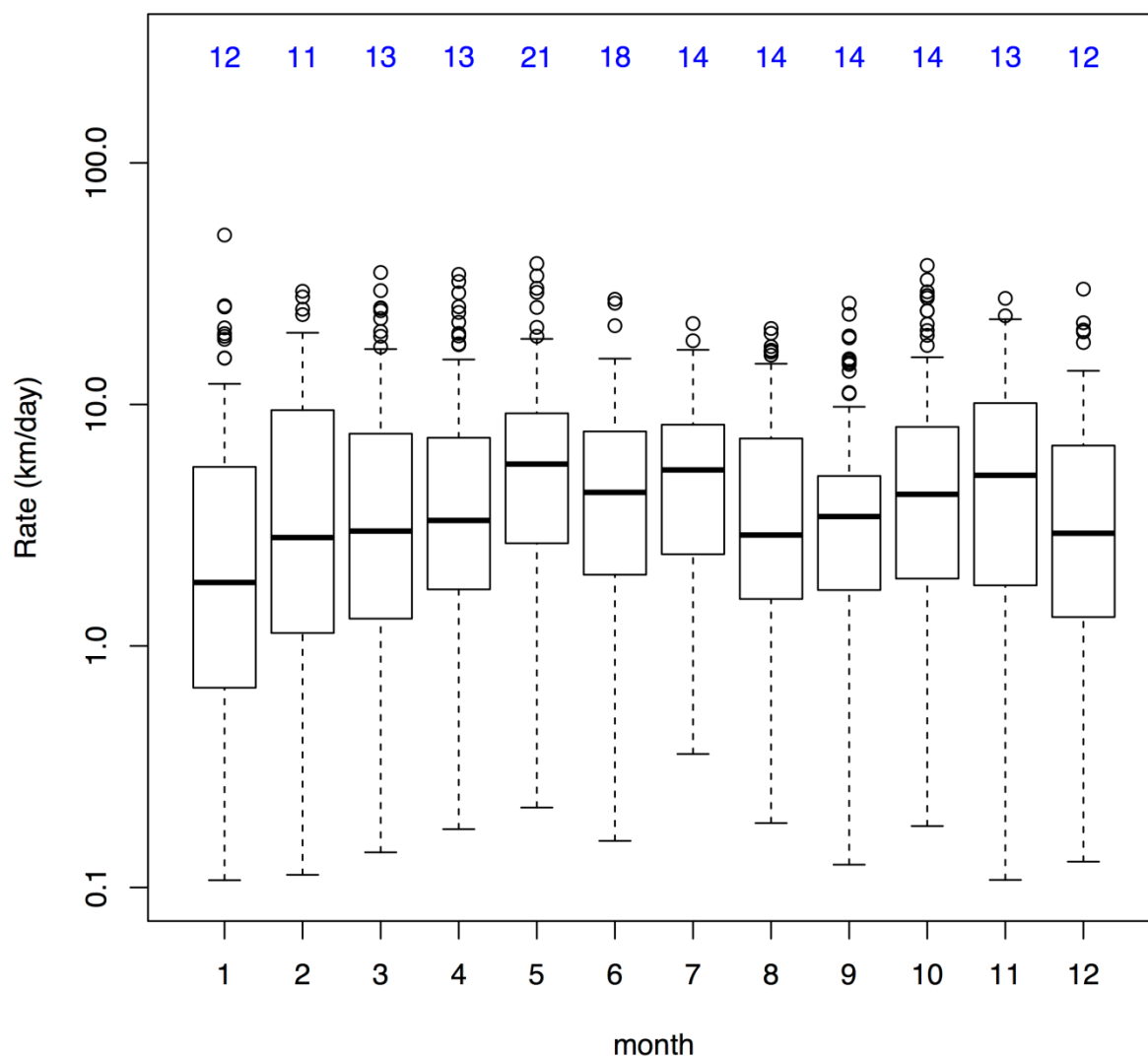




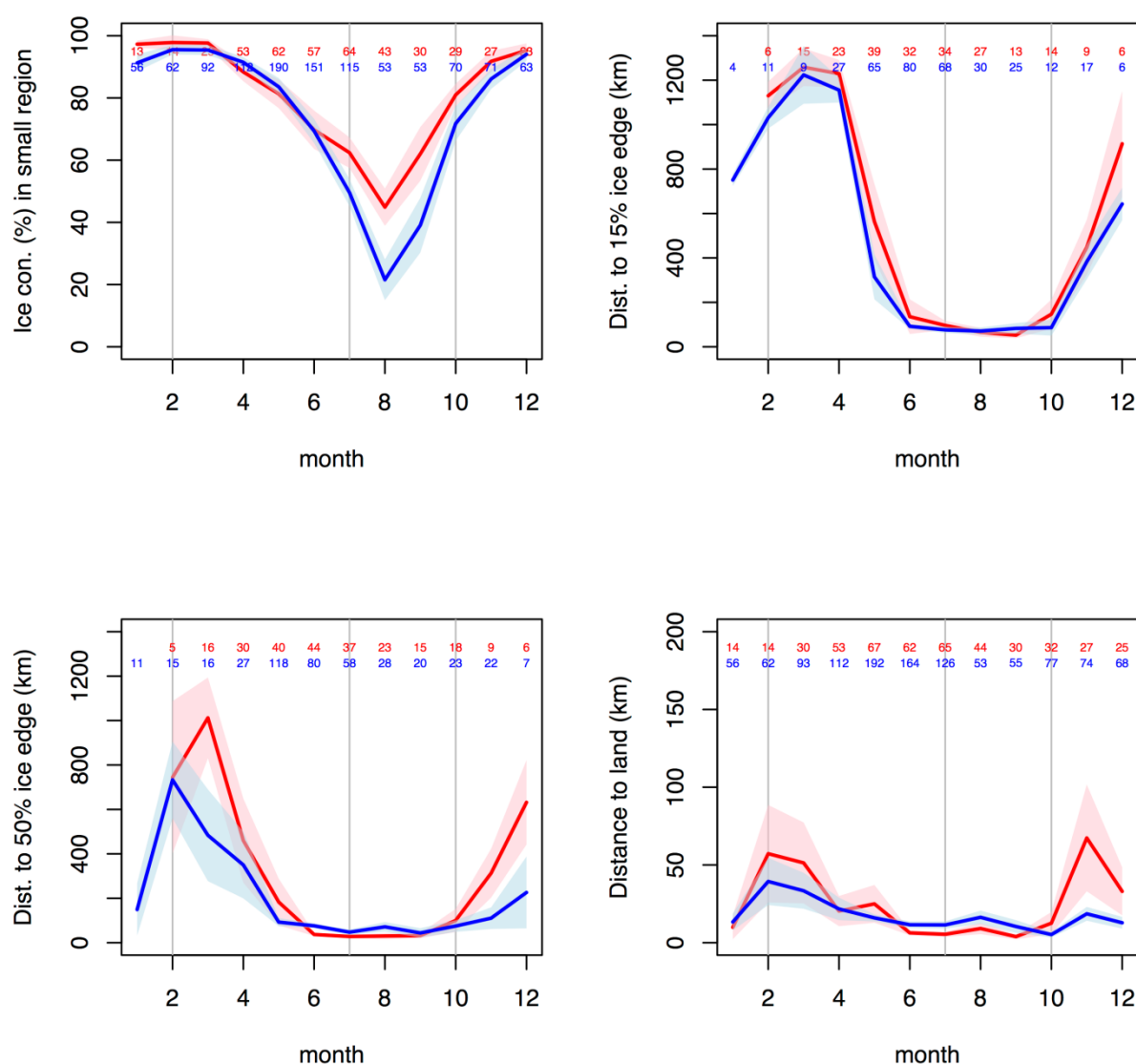
**Figure 9.5.** Movement rate of KB adult female bears (km/day) in the 1990s Y axis is on a log scale and labels are listed as raw values. Blue numbers indicate the number of individual bears in each month.



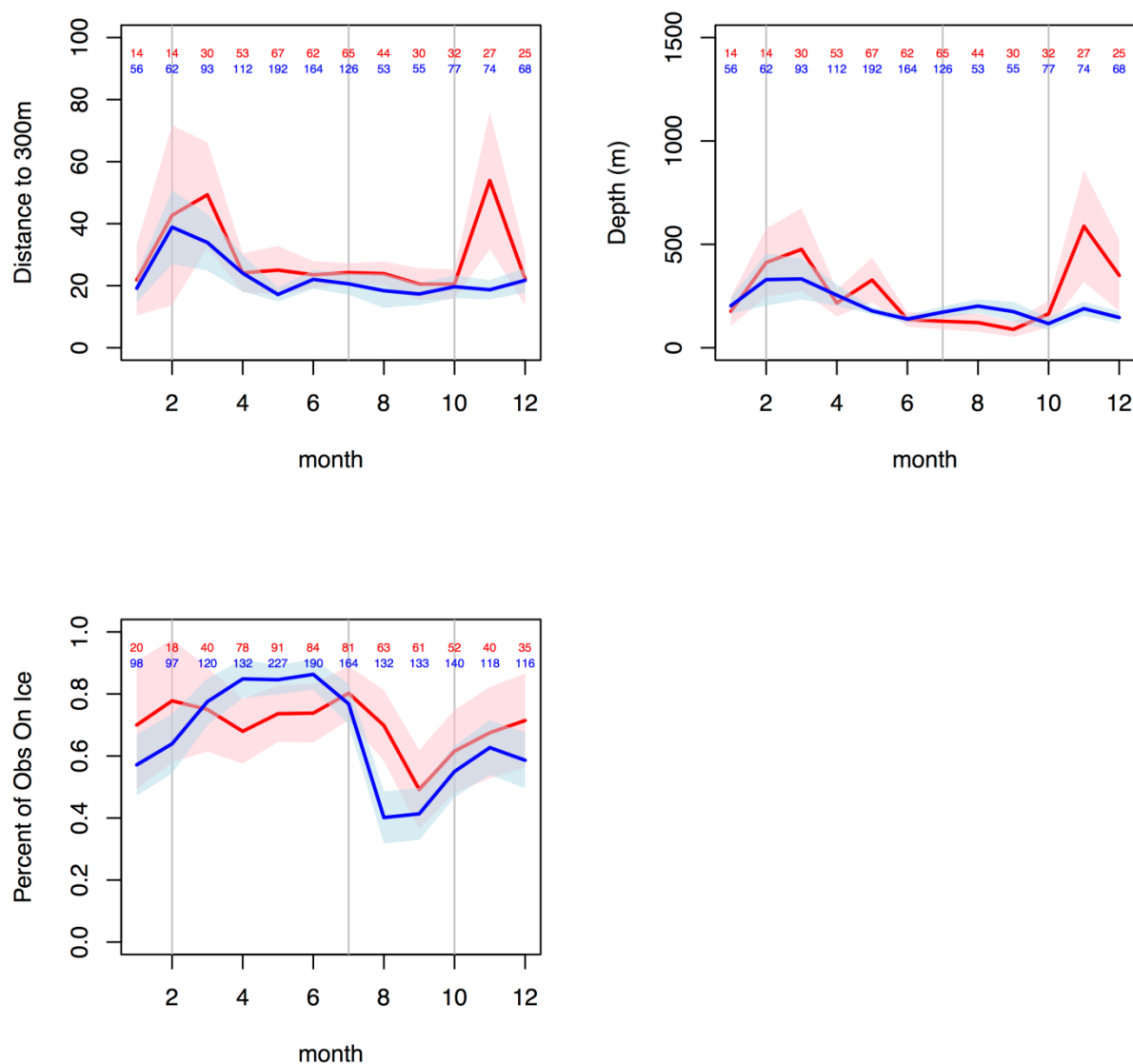
**Figure 9.6.** Movement rate of BB adult female bears (km/day) in the 2000s. Y axis is on a log scale and labels are listed as raw values. Blue numbers indicate the number of individual bears in each month.



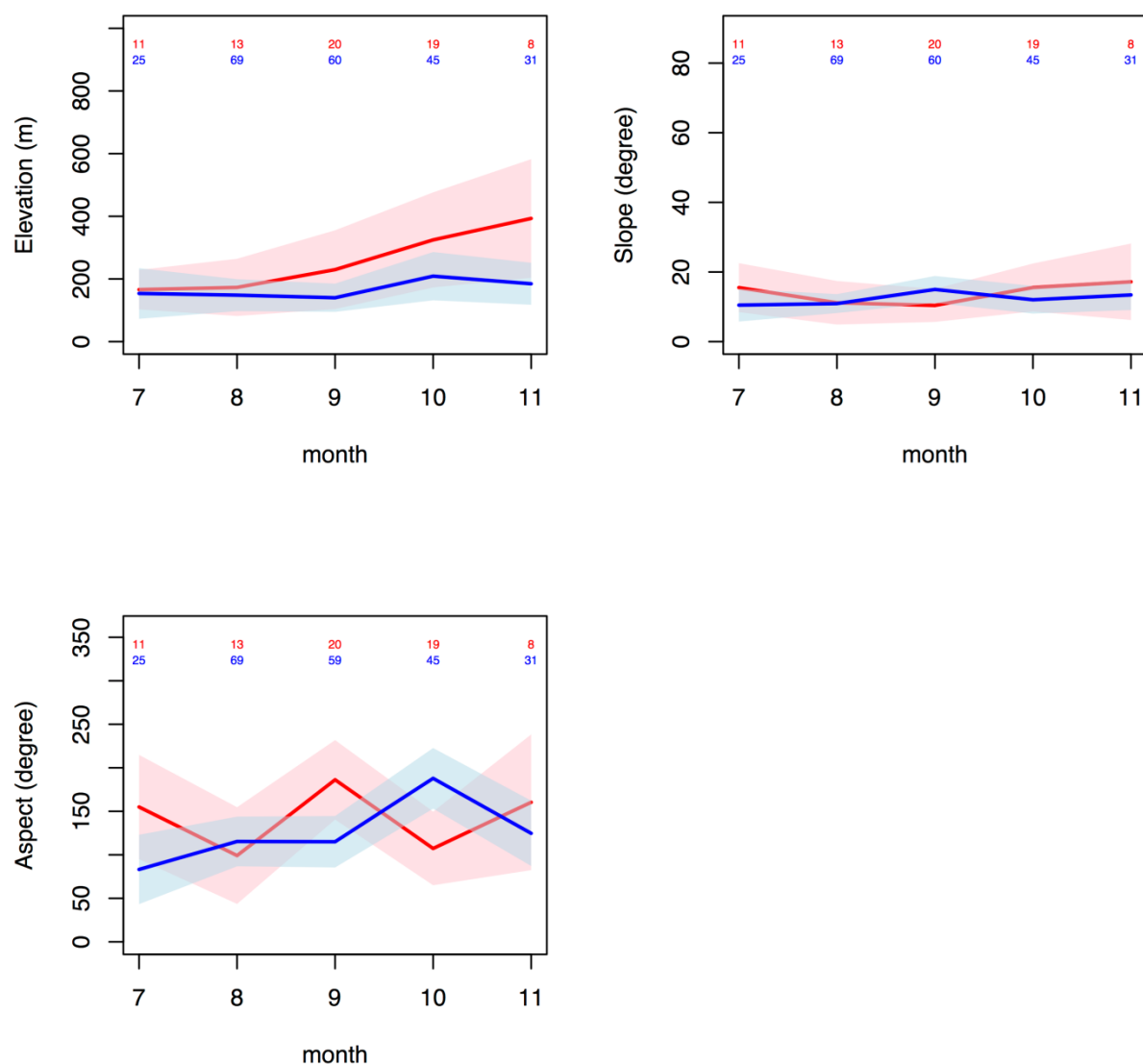
**Figure 9.7.** 1990s and 2000s adult female polar bear habitat use in KB for each of four sea-ice habitat variables: sea-ice concentration in small buffer, distance to 15% sea-ice concentration, distance to 50% sea-ice concentration, and distance to the nearest land. Data from 1990s are shown in red, 2000s in blue. Shaded regions represent 2 SE of the mean. Vertical lines indicate monthly boundaries for seasons (winter, spring summer) used in the analysis. SSM/I sea-ice concentration is used in both decades. Months 8 -10 also represent land use by bears. The small numbers indicate the number of movements captured within each months.



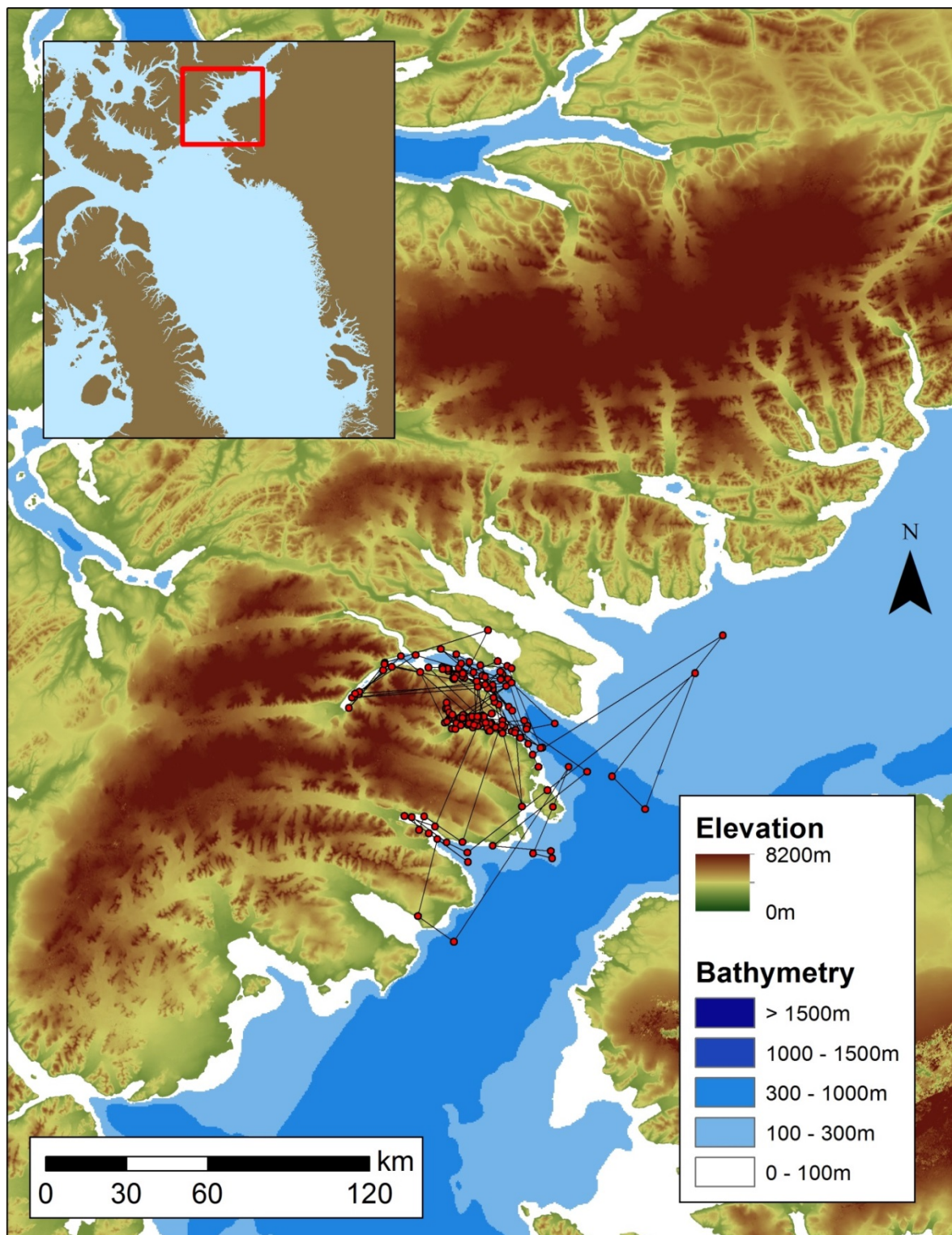
**Figure 9.8.** 1990s and 2000s adult female polar bear habitat use in KB for each of three sea-ice habitat variables: distance to 300 m depth contour, depth (bathymetry), and percentage of observations on the sea ice. Data from 1990s are shown in red, 2000s in blue. Shaded regions represent 2 SE of the mean. Vertical lines indicate monthly boundaries for seasons (winter, spring summer). SSM/I sea-ice concentration is used in both decades. Months 8 -10 also represent land use by bears.

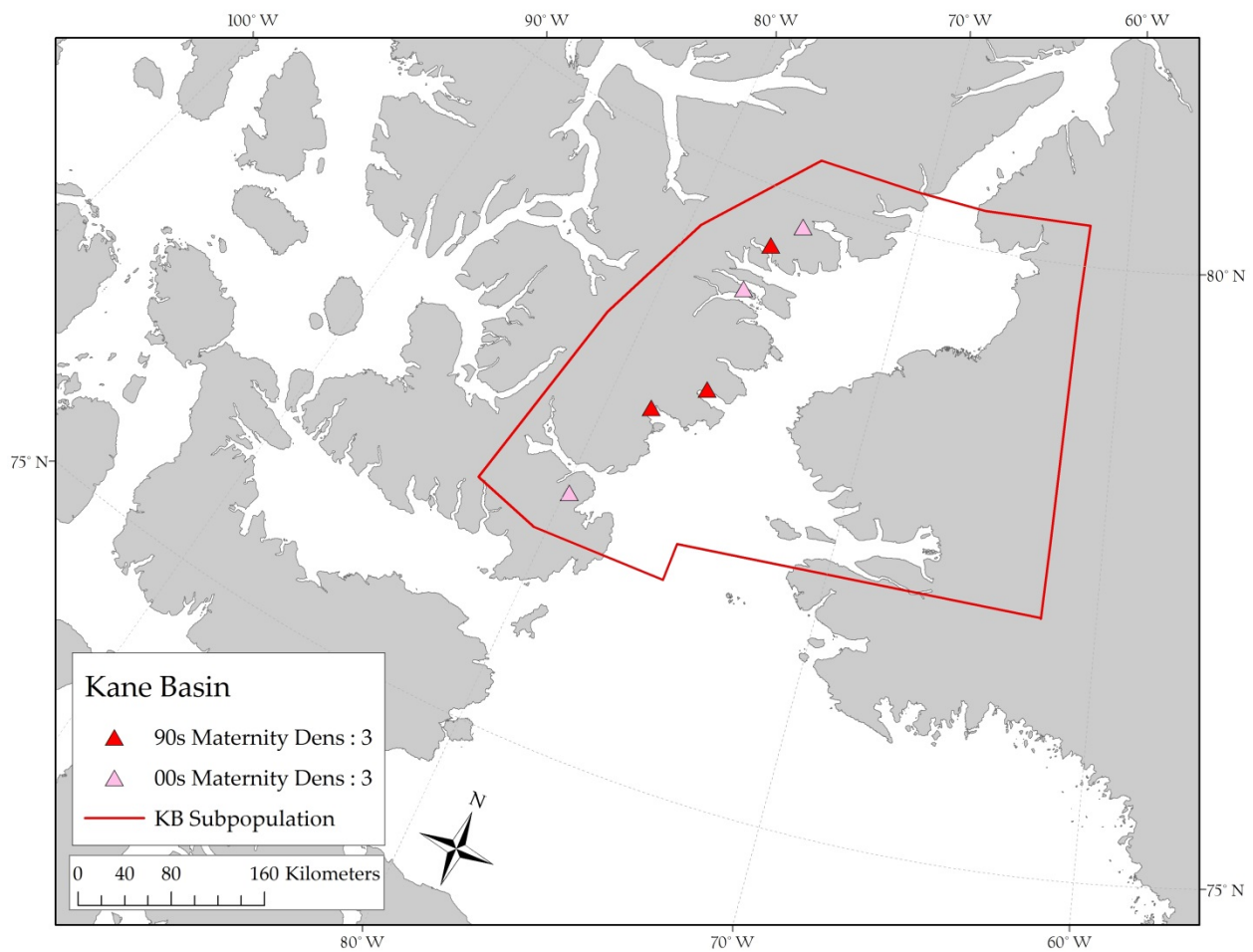


**Figure 9.9.** 1990s and 2000s adult female polar bear habitat use in KB for each of three terrestrial habitat variables: elevation, slope, and aspect. Data from 1990s are shown in red, 2000s in blue. Shaded regions represent 2 SE of the mean. Months 8 -10 also represent land use by bears.

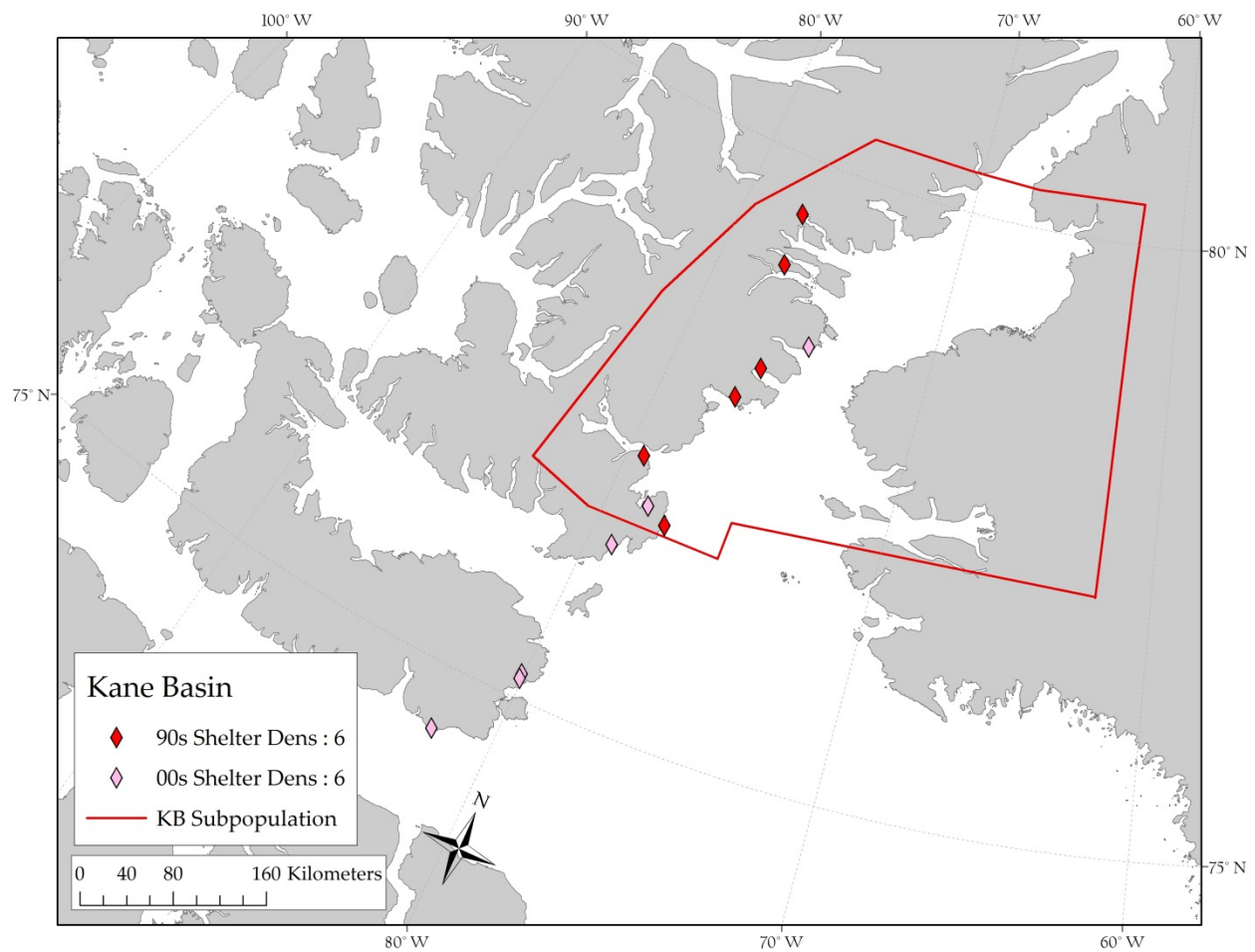


**Figure 9.10.** ASTER Digital Elevation Model (DEM) used in KB with trackline of a single bear tagged in the 2000s.



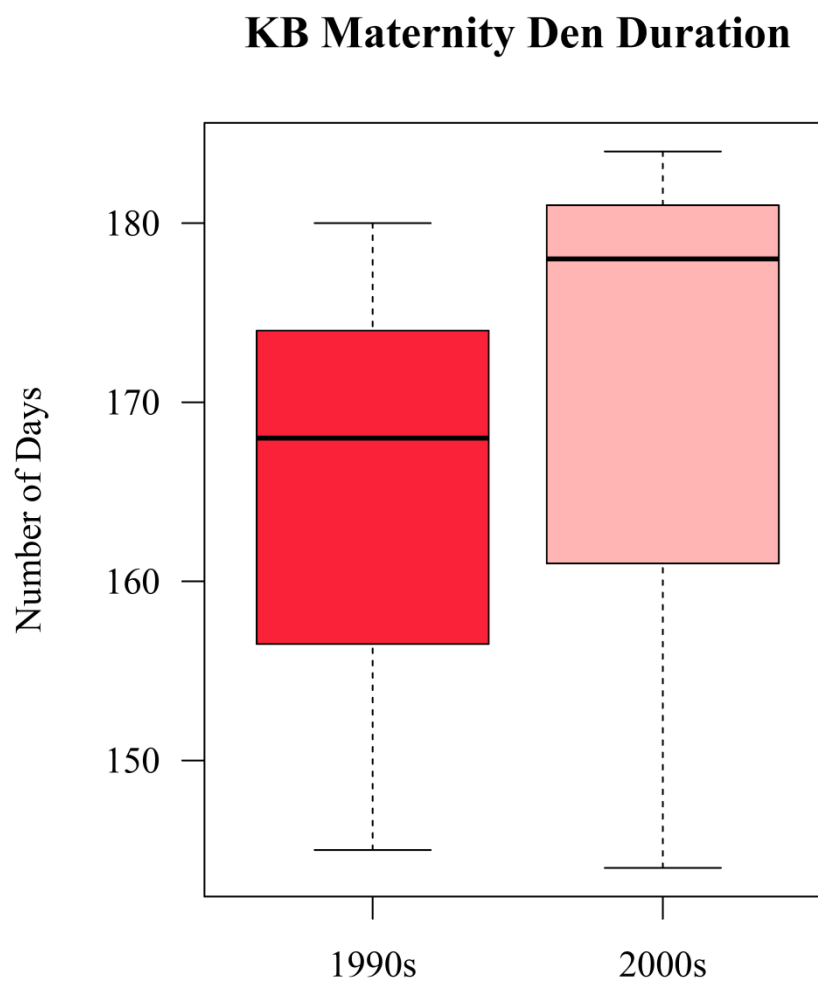
**Figure 9.11.** Distribution of KB polar bear maternity dens in the 1990s and 2000s.



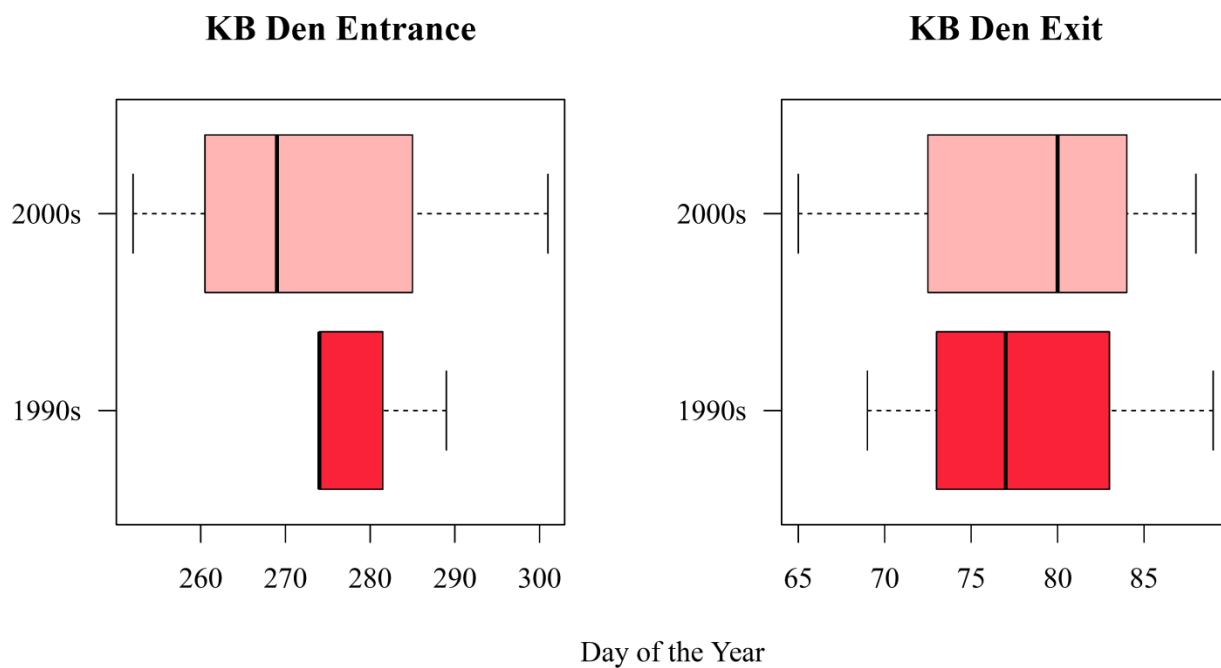
**Figure 9.12.** Distribution of KB polar bear shelter dens in the 1990s and 2000s.



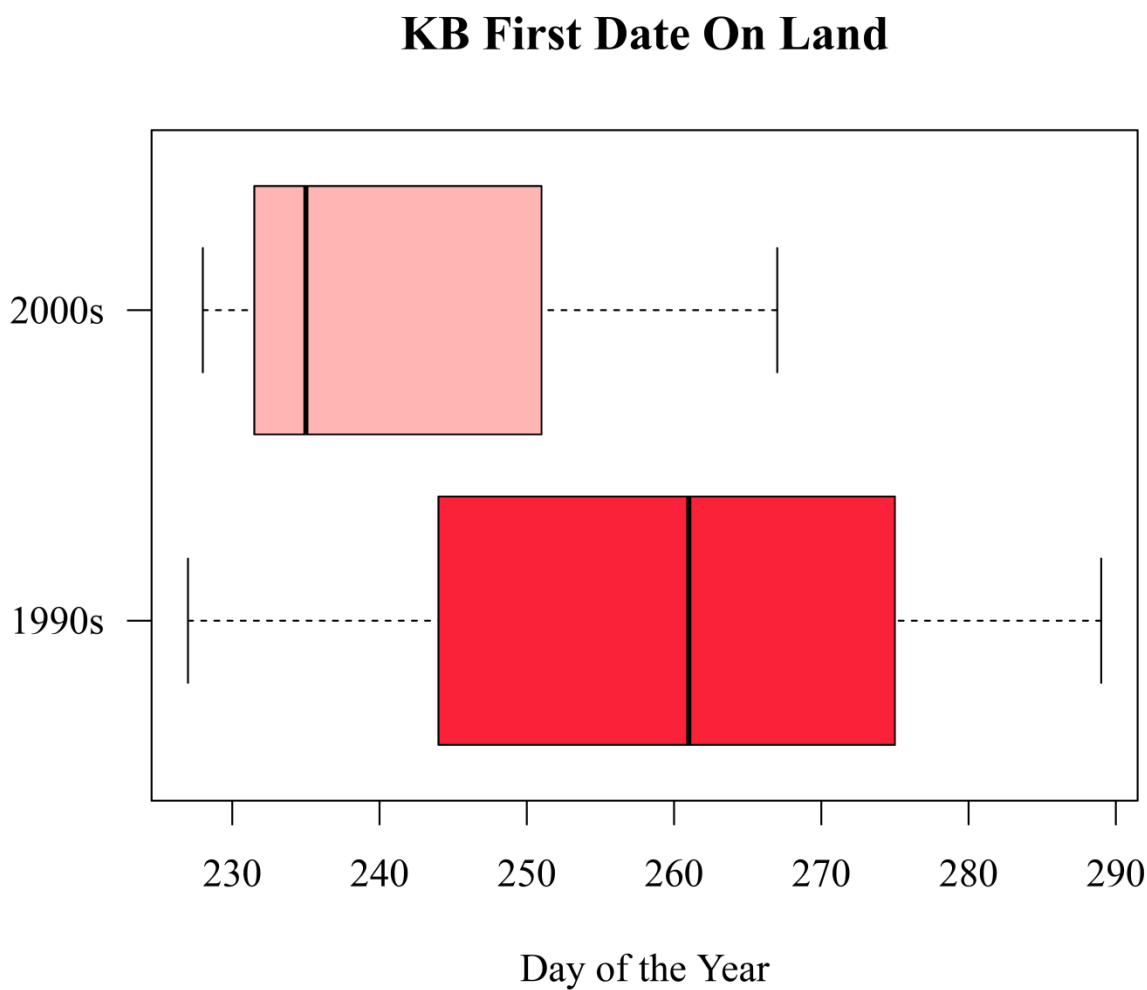
**Figure 9.13.** Boxplots comparing den duration of Kane Basin (KB) polar bear maternity dens ( $P = 1$ ) (1990s:  $n = 3$ ; 2000s:  $n = 3$ ).



**Figure 9.14.** Boxplots comparing entry ( $P = 0.6$ ) and exit dates ( $P = 1$ ) of Kane Basin (KB) polar bear maternity dens (1990s:  $n = 3$ ; 2000s:  $n = 3$ ).

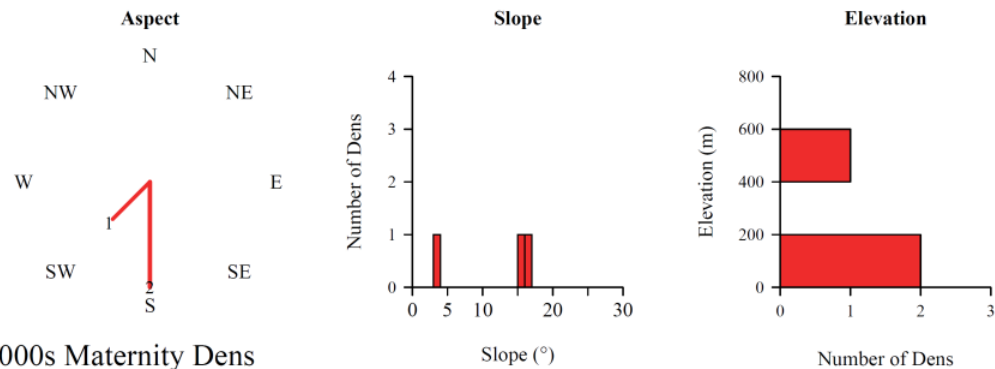


**Figure 9.15.** Boxplots comparing the first date on land (FDOL) of pregnant female polar bears from the 1990s ( $n = 3$ ) and 2000s ( $n = 3$ ) in Kane Basin (KB) ( $P = 1$ ).

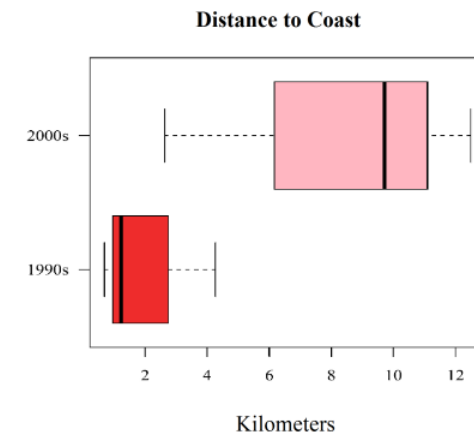
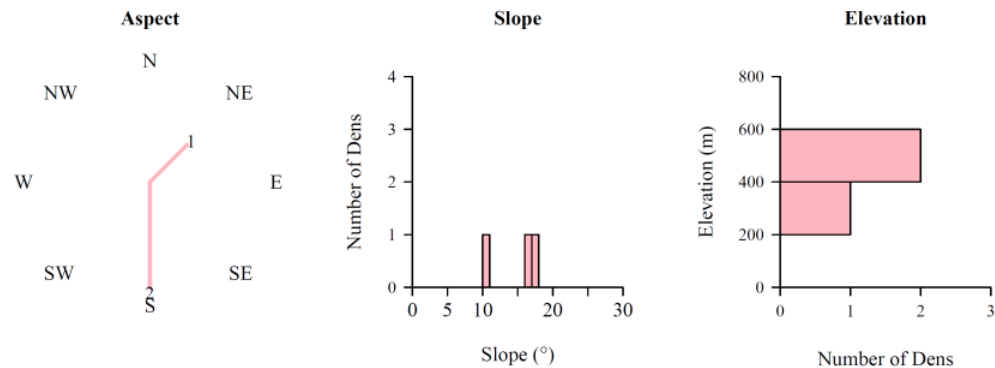


**Figure 9.16.** Plots comparing aspect, slope, elevation, and distance to coast for the 1990s ( $n = 3$ ) and 2000s ( $n = 3$ ) polar bear maternity dens in Kane Basin. The aspect plot consists of a compass face with lines marking the directions that dens faced. The lines are annotated with numbers noting how many dens were found at that aspect. None of the habitat variables significantly differed between the two time periods (elevation, aspect, distance to coast:  $P = 0.2$ ; slope:  $P = 0.4$ ).

#### 1990s Maternity Dens



#### 2000s Maternity Dens



## CHAPTER 10

# GENETIC MARK-RECAPTURE STUDY OF POLAR BEARS IN KANE BASIN

### KEY FINDINGS

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- We used joint live-recapture and dead-recovery mark-recapture models to analyze data for the Kane Basin (KB) polar bear subpopulation, with the goal of updating estimates of subpopulation size and survival. The dataset consisted of 277 initial live captures (1992-1997 = 150, 2012-2014 = 127), 89 live recaptures (1992-1997 = 53, 2012-2014 = 36), and 24 harvest returns of research-marked bears 1992-2014.
  - Mark-recapture research conducted in the Kane Basin subpopulation yielded an estimate of abundance of 357 polar bears (95% CI: 221 – 493) for 2013 – 2014. An estimate derived during 1995 – 1997 yielded 224 bears (95% CI: 145 – 303). Based on physical MR, the size of the KB subpopulation was previously estimated to be 164 polar bears (95% CI: 94-234) for 1994-1997 (noting that this estimate applies to different years than our re-analysis; Taylor et al. 2008).
  - We documented more bears in the eastern regions of the Kane Basin subpopulation during 2012 – 2014 than during the 1990s. Eastern Kane Basin was searched during the 1990s although with less effort than in the 2010s due to the low density of bears observed there. The difference in distribution between the 1990s and 2010s may reflect differences in spatial distribution of bears, possibly influenced by reduced hunting pressure by Greenland in eastern KB and thus an increased density of bears in KB, but also some differences in sampling protocols.
  - The 2013 – 2014 estimate of abundance suggests 357 (221 – 493) bears currently use KB in springtime (i.e., the Kane Basin super-population; Kendall et al. 1997), and the current point estimate is higher than the historical estimate. Based on a randomization procedure that assumed normal sampling distributions for abundance estimates, the mean difference between the estimate of KB abundance for 2013-2014 and the estimate for 1995-1997 was approximately 133 bears (standard deviation of the difference  $\approx$  80 bears), with 95% of the sampling distribution suggesting that population change between the two time periods could have been positive. This suggests relatively strong evidence for a stable to increasing subpopulation, and is consistent with data on movements, condition and reproduction. We encourage some caution in interpretation of population growth due to potential expansion of the sampling frame and differences in sampling protocols between the 1990s versus the 2010s study periods.
  - Current estimates of total survival for age 3+ females (0.95; SE: 0.04) and dependent bears were consistent with previous research. Estimates of unharvested survival for 3+
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females appear sufficiently high for positive population growth. Updated estimates of total survival are lower for age 3+ males (0.87; SE: 0.06). Our longer-term data set and several other ecological, sampling, and technical considerations may contribute to this result.

- We documented a reduction in mortality associated with harvest, likely attributable to implementation of Greenland's harvest quota in 2006.
  - Demographic modeling suggests Kane Basin bears exhibit relatively high fidelity to the springtime study area, with <5% of marked bears emigrating on an annual basis.
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### 10.1. Introduction

Large-scale environmental changes are occurring across the circumpolar Arctic (Comiso et al. 2008, Stroeve et al. 2012, Laidre et al. 2015; see also Chapters 5 and 9), with general reductions in the temporal availability and spatial extent of sea ice. For sea ice obligate polar bears, which are among the most highly sensitive of marine mammals to the projected impacts of climate change (Laidre et al. 2008), long-term impacts are anticipated to be negative (Atwood et al. 2015). However, there likely will be significant temporal and spatial variability among subpopulations in the short-term (Stirling and Derocher 2012). Indeed, the effects of the changing Arctic environment on polar bears have been documented in some regions but are less clear or have not been realized elsewhere (e.g., Rode et al. 2012, 2014, Bromaghin et al. 2015, Obbard et al. 2015, Lunn et al. 2016).

The Kane Basin (KB) polar bear subpopulation, regarded as part of the Arctic archipelago region (Amstrup et al. 2008), covers a small region between Nunavut, Canada and NW Greenland. Abundance of KB was last estimated at ~164 (SE: 35) polar bears based on a physical mark-recapture study completed during 1992 – 1997 (Taylor et al. 2008). At the time of this estimate, the harvested population growth rate ( $\lambda = 0.919$ ) indicated that the subpopulation was over-exploited. The unharvested growth rate also was low ( $\lambda = 1.009$ ; Taylor et al. 2008), suggesting limited capacity for the KB subpopulation to increase even in the absence of human-

caused removals. In response, Greenland implemented a quota in 2006 that significantly reduced the total harvest from Kane Basin (see Methods below). The small subpopulation size, low growth rates, and long-term exploitation led Taylor et al. (2008) to suggest that Kane Basin may act as a sink for neighboring subpopulations such as Baffin Bay.

The KB subpopulation is currently considered to be declining (PBSG 2015): 100% of population viability analysis (PVA) simulations (using data on abundance and vital rates from Taylor et al. 2008 and reported Canadian and Greenlandic catches) resulted in a decline in abundance within 10 years. However, no new research to update estimates of abundance or vital rates has occurred since the 1990s study. Given the outdated demographic information, the substantial changes in Arctic sea-ice habitats over the past several decades (e.g., Stroeve et al. 2012, Chapters 4 and 9), and the reduction in harvest in 2006, there was uncertainty as to the current status of polar bears in Kane Basin. As such, there was a need for new information to inform status and harvest management (Chapter 1).

Although bears in KB are not genetically different from those in Baffin Bay (Paetkau et al. 1999, Chapter 2), satellite telemetry and capture records indicate that they move among KB and neighboring subpopulations but exhibit strong fidelity to specific regions (Taylor et al. 2001, Chapters 2, 5, and 9). These data have formed the basis for population delineation, and polar bears in Kane Basin are considered a distinct demographic unit for management purposes.

Our objective was to estimate the current abundance and vital rates, including survival, of polar bears in the KB subpopulation. We sought to compare new estimates of abundance with those derived from earlier research (Taylor et al. 2008). These results, in conjunction with information on sea-ice dynamics, spatial ecology, reproductive output, survival, and other metrics, will be used to inform subpopulation status. The data used in this project spanned a 23-

year period (1992-2014): an initial 6-year physical capture and dead recovery sampling period (1992 – 1997) was followed by a 14-year period with dead recoveries only (1998 – 2011) and a recent (2012 – 2014) live capture (physical and genetic) and dead recovery session. Jurisdictions across the Arctic have increasingly invested in non-physical capture based monitoring methods, largely to address social considerations, particularly in Nunavut, regarding wildlife handling (*cf.* Chapter 1) and to facilitate more rapid monitoring. Prior to this study and research in the Baffin Bay subpopulation (Chapter 5), however, the focus of such alternative methods has been aerial surveys (e.g., Aars et al. 2009, Obbard et al. 2015, Stapleton et al. 2016).

## 10.2. Materials and Methods

### Study Area

The KB subpopulation covers ~150,000 km<sup>2</sup> and spans portions of Nunavut, Canada, including Ellesmere Island, as well as northwestern Greenland (boundaries evaluated in Taylor et al. 2001; Figure 10.1). However, the boundaries of the KB subpopulation encompass a substantial amount of land and glaciers so that the essential sea-ice polar bear habitat only amounts to less than one half of the area enclosed by the borders of the management unit (*cf.* Figure 10.3 and 11.2). The subpopulation ranges over Kane Basin, Nares Strait, Smith Sound and adjacent fjords on eastern Ellesmere Island and Northwest Greenland (the Qaanaaq area) and the southern part of Kennedy Channel. It is bounded to the north by the Arctic Basin subpopulation (via the Kennedy Channel), to the south by the Baffin Bay (BB) and Lancaster Sound (LS) subpopulations, and to the west by Norwegian Bay (NW; PBSG 2010). The KB subpopulation is regarded as a part of the Arctic archipelago ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008); historically sea ice remained present in the northern range (i.e., Nares Strait-Kane Basin)



throughout the year, largely due to the movement of polar pack ice from Arctic Basin, and reaches a minimum in late summer. However, this pattern has changed markedly in recent decades (Chapter 9, Figure 9.2). KB is partially connected to neighboring subpopulations; particularly notable though limited interchange occurs with BB and LS (Chapter 4). The North Water polynya, a large area of open water in northern Baffin Bay and southern Smith Sound, is a significant regional geographic feature that exhibits substantial intra- and inter-annual variability in spatial extent and is thought to form a partial barrier between KB and BB – LS. The KB subpopulation is subjected to subsistence harvest by Inuit living in Jones Sound (Canada) and the Qaanaaq area (NW Greenland; PBSG 2010, Born et al. 2011).

### Field Sampling

Initial surveying was conducted in Kane Basin during springs (April – May), 1992 – 1997 (described in Taylor et al. 2008). Additional sampling was completed during fall 1994, but we excluded these data from the present analyses to reduce temporal heterogeneity (e.g., sampling cubs-of-the-year in spring versus fall yields substantial differences in estimates of survival). All sighted bears, including dependent offspring, were chemically immobilized (Stirling et al. 1989) and uniquely marked with plastic ear tags and permanent lip tattoos (Taylor et al. 2008). Ages of independent bears were determined by extracting vestigial premolars and counting annular rings (Calvert and Ramsay 1998), whereas cubs-of-the-year and yearling bears were considered of known age. A sample of adult females was outfitted with satellite collars as part of a separate study quantifying movements and spatial ecology (Taylor et al. 2001, Chapter 9).

Although Taylor et al. (2008) reported that they conducted a uniform search of the study

site each year, records delineating their survey effort were unavailable. Subsequent examination of annual distributions of captures suggested incremental increases in the size of the study area, progressing northwards, with apparent expansions in the sampling frame between 1992 and 1993 (northward along eastern Ellesmere Island into the Nares Strait region). Between 1994 and 1995, survey efforts were expanded eastward into Kane Basin proper off the Humboldt Glacier in Northwest Greenland (E. Born, pers. obs.) which inferred from Taylor et al. (2001) was also the case in 1996 and 1997; Figure 10.2). No live-recapture sampling occurred during 1998 – 2011, but we obtained recoveries of harvested bears during this interval. Available information also suggests eastern Kane Basin was covered in the 1990s, though no captures were made there.

We surveyed KB during 25 April – 6 May, 2012; 27 April – 10 May, 2013; and 28 April – 19 May, 2014. Sampling windows were comparable to the 1990s, although surveying in 1992 and 1993 occurred earlier (mid-April) and for shorter windows of time. We sampled sea-ice habitats by helicopter (Bell 206 LongRanger) across the entirety of western and northern Kane Basin, including landfast ice in fjords and nearshore areas as well as offshore pack ice, but excluded more open water habitats of the North Water polynya. We also did not survey the sea ice in the fjords of the populated Qaanaaq area in NW Greenland (i.e., the eastern parts of the North Water polynya) because hunting pressure for marine mammals in these areas is generally high and consequently “resident” polar bears do not exist in the Qaanaaq area (E. Born, pers. obs.). Sampling was primarily completed via directed searching in 2012, with searches focused in areas believed to provide the most suitable polar bear habitat (“adaptive sampling”). In 2013, we completed directed searching and also flew ad hoc transects oriented approximately perpendicular to the coastline, particularly near Greenland, to ensure that effort was well-distributed across the landscape.

In 2012 and 2013, most bears were sampled via physical capture, including chemical immobilization and application of ear tags and lip tattoos as described above. We collected tissue samples from physically captured bears (for genotyping) and recorded additional information including sex, family status, field-estimated age class (cub-of-the-year, yearling, 2-year old, subadult, or adult) and standard morphometric measurements. We completed additional sampling in 2012 and 2013 via remote biopsy darting (Pagano et al. 2014) to collect genetic tissues for subsequent genotyping and analyses (e.g., Herreman and Peacock 2013). Cubs-of-the-year were too small in springtime to be biopsy darted and thus were not sampled when their mothers were biopsy darted (although COY were sampled during physical captures). For bears that were not physically immobilized, sex was confirmed upon genetic analyses (see below).

In connection with immobilization and handling, we deployed satellite transmitters on 36 polar bears in 2012 and 2013 (see Chapter 9; 2012: 6 satellite radio collars on adult females; 10 satellite ear-tags on adults and subadults of both sexes; 2013: 10 satellite radio collars on adult females; 10 satellite ear-tags on adults and subadults of both sexes). This work enabled us to evaluate distribution and habitat use during the genetic mark-recapture sampling and the aerial survey (Chapter 11) and to conduct a post hoc assessment of sampling representativeness during sampling.

We modified our sampling strategy during 2014. We stratified the study area into high- and low-density areas based on our observations of polar bears in 2012 and 2013 (i.e., presumed densities) and searched for bears from systematically spaced transects. This design enabled us to more efficiently allocate effort and reduced the potential for spatial heterogeneity in detection. Systematic sampling also facilitated the simultaneous completion of an aerial survey (Chapter

11) to derive an abundance estimate, based on different methodology, for comparison with the capture-based estimate.

Strata conformed to general landscape features and ice types: the high-density stratum included landfast ice within fjords as well as nearshore pack ice (within ~30 km of the nearest land mass); the low-density stratum included farther offshore pack ice (Figure 10.3). We delineated the landward extent of the study area using current GIS layers from Greenland and Nunavut. We used Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS; <http://modis.gsfc.nasa.gov/>) images with 1 km resolution to delineate the extent of available habitat by approximating the edge of the North Water polynya. Because the polynya's boundaries can change rapidly, we delineated the extent of the polynya adjacent to the section surveyed on a particular day using MODIS imagery from that day (when possible) or as close to that date as possible (when imagery was unclear on that date due to atmospheric conditions). We examined the delineated study area in relation to weekly regional sea-ice charts produced by the Canadian Ice Service (<https://www.ec.gc.ca/glaces-ice/>) for confirmation. During sampling, we also collected GPS waypoints at the edge of the polynya to verify delineation.

Transects were systematically spaced at 6-km and 18-km intervals in the high- and low-density strata, respectively, based on anticipated encounter rates and available resources. We also sampled during ferry flights (e.g., between survey transects). Survey protocols in 2014 (detailed in Chapter 11) were designed to facilitate the simultaneous collection of data for mark-recapture and the aerial survey. All mark-recapture sampling in 2014 was conducted via remote biopsy darting.

### Harvest Recoveries

We used harvest records to compile dead recovery data for polar bears captured in KB and subsequently harvested there or in neighboring subpopulations during 1992 – 2013 (Burnham 1993). Harvest was monitored by the return of tags or lip tattoos during 1992 – 2010 and by genotyping during 2011 – 2014. Data including date and location of recovery and sex and estimated age were recorded for harvested bears and individuals killed in defense of life and property. Reported harvest rate in KB was relatively high during the 1990s (range: 6 – 17 bears / year) but significantly decreased by the mid-2000s (2 – 8 bears / year; Chapter 8), likely due to factors including changes in sea-ice conditions limiting hunter access by use of dog sleds to northeastern KB (E. Born, pers. obs.) and the implementation of a Greenlandic quota system in 2006. Greenland's reporting system also improved with the implementation of the quota (Chapter 8). Previous studies assumed that harvests of all marked bears were reported when natural survival was calculated and, therefore, the reporting rate  $r$  was interpreted as the proportion of mortality due to harvest (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, 2008). However, more recently, genetic data suggested under-reporting of marked bears in the harvest, with decreases in reporting correlated with increasing marker age (Chapter 8).

### Genetic Analyses

*DNA Extraction* – Dried biopsy samples, new and archived tissue samples, and harvest specimens (frozen or in ethanol) were sent to Wildlife Genetics International (Nelson, B.C., Canada) for analysis using protocols previously validated for bears (Kendall et al. 2009). DNA was extracted from ~ 3mm<sup>2</sup> pieces of tissue with QIAGEN DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kits (<http://www.qiagen.com/>). Most biopsy darting samples consisted of a plug of a skin and subcutaneous tissue. This provided ample material for DNA extraction and residual tissue for future

analyses. In a small proportion of cases, the available sample consisted of a tuft of hair. DNA was extracted from these hair samples using approximately 10 guard hair roots or 30 pieces of underfur. In a few cases, where a biopsy sample contained no visible tissue, DNA was successfully extracted by soaking the barbed needle from the biopsy dart in the lysis mix (QIAGEN buffer ATL + proteinase K).

*Marker Selection* – To select markers for the analysis of individual identity, we used allele frequency data from 1,771 polar bears for which complete 20-locus genotypes existed before the genetic mark-recapture began (Government of Nunavut unpublished data). We ranked the 20 microsatellite markers in the dataset by expected heterozygosity. The 8 most variable markers that could be analyzed together in a single sequencer lane were selected for use. These surpassed the required standard for marker variability ( $HE = 0.80$ ; Paetkau 2003). In addition to the 8 microsatellite markers, we analyzed sex on every sample, using a *ZFX/ZFY* marker. This 9th marker roughly halved the match probability (assuming a balanced sex ratio), even for close relatives, as well as providing replication of sex data for individuals that were sampled more than once.

*Genotyping* – The analysis of individual identity followed a 3-phase approach. Phase 1 was a first pass of all extracted samples using the 9 selected markers (*G10B*, *CXX20*, *G10H*, *G10P*, *145P07*, *MU50*, *MU59*, *G10X* and *ZFX/ZFY*). Samples that failed at > 6 of 9 markers on the first pass were set aside and did not proceed further in the analyses. Previous experience has shown that such samples are prone to errors and run out of DNA before generating a complete (phase 2) and reproducible (phase 3) genotype (D. Paetkau, pers. comm.).

The first pass was followed by a cleanup phase in which data points that were weak or difficult to read the first time were re-analyzed. During cleanup we used 5  $\mu$ L of DNA per

reaction instead of the 3  $\mu$ L was used during first pass. At the conclusion of the cleanup phase, the remaining samples (99.5%) had high-confidence scores for all 9 markers. In cases where the genetic sex result contradicted the reported sex based on field assessment, genetic sex was checked using a second independent marker (*amelogenin*; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7695123>), thus confirming the results, and ruling out the possibility that a mutation at a particular marker was to blame. In all cases, results from the second marker confirmed that the field data was the source of error.

The third and final phase of analysis was error-checking, following the published protocol of reanalyzing the mismatching markers in highly similar pairs of genotypes (Paetkau 2003). This error-check included genotypes from the 4,657 polar bears in the database, plus published data from 473 individuals (Paetkau et al. 1999). The error-checking protocol functions on the principle that when  $\geq 2$  samples are genotyped from a given individual, and when 1 of those genotypes contains an error, the result is a pair of genotypes which match at all-but-1 marker (a ‘1MMpair’). Less commonly, 2MM-pairs are created when 2 errors have been made in the genotypes of the samples from a given individual.

An important distinction with this protocol is that it is designed to ensure accurate individual ID — and has been proven to do so with a high degree of efficiency (Kendall et al. 2009) — but it is not intended or expected to correct errors when just one sample has been genotyped from a given individual. In addition to re-analyzing mismatching markers, this protocol also involved the inclusion of additional markers for some samples. Finally, we also searched the dataset for genotype matches that seemed unlikely based on our field data. In each case, three extra markers were added to the genotypes to lower the probability of chance matches between individuals. The extra loci confirmed all of these matches. Once the genotyping and

error-checking was complete, we defined an individual for each unique 9-locus genotype.

*Marker Power* – In addition to the genotyping errors that were targeted during error-checking, DNA-based datasets are prone to a second source of error, when match probabilities are so high that some individuals have identical genotypes. Calculated match probabilities provide no practical insight into the risk of sampling individuals with matching genotypes, because the calculations are so dependent on the assumptions made about the degree of relatedness among the sampled individuals. We therefore used the direct, empirical approach of extrapolation from the observed mismatch curve (Figure 10.4). We expect to see roughly order-of-magnitude decreases in the number of pairs of individuals whose genotypes match at increasing numbers of markers (Paetkau 2003). In our dataset the slope of this curve was reasonably true to that rule of thumb. From this curve, it is estimated that we would have sampled ~ 0.3 OMM-pairs (individuals whose genotypes matched at 9 markers) in this multiyear dataset of 4,657 individuals; a very small risk of error in proportion to the size of the dataset. In addition to reducing the risk of sampling individuals with the same genotype, another benefit to having such a powerful marker system was realized during error-checking, where the amount of time required to reanalyze the mismatching markers underlying 1MM- and 2MM-pairs was trivial in proportion to the scale of the project, because there were so few such pairs.

### Statistical Analyses

We analyzed joint live-capture and dead-recovery data from the KB subpopulation with the Burnham (1993) mark-recapture model, which combines the Cormack-Jolly-Seber (CJS) live-recapture model with the Brownie-Seber dead-recovery model to estimate survival ( $S$ ), recapture ( $p$ ), reporting ( $r$ ), and fidelity ( $F$ ) probabilities. With the Burnham model, live



recaptures are assumed to occur (relatively) instantaneously within the study area, whereas dead recoveries can occur year-round between live capture periods and may take place within or outside the live encounter study area. We assumed that harvests prior to April 15 occurred before the live encounter period in year  $t$ , (i.e., in year  $t - 1$ ); post-April 15 harvests were considered to have occurred after the live encounter period (i.e., year  $t$ ). This treatment of the data resulted in no instances in which a bear was recovered before being captured alive. We acknowledge that there was some temporal overlap of live recapture and dead recovery periods in KB, but for a long-lived species such as polar bears, the exact timing of harvest relative to the live capture sampling period is less important.

We analyzed data and constructed models in program MARK (White and Burnham 1999). We assembled capture histories from the live capture and dead recovery data and included harvest recoveries through 2013. Although ages were estimated with high resolution during the initial 1990s study period, there was uncertainty in field assessment of age during the 2012 – 2014 sampling frame, particularly with biopsy darting. Hence, we identified relatively coarse age classes (*cf.* Taylor et al. 2008, Peacock et al. 2013), including cubs-of-the-year (coy), yearlings (yrl), 2-year olds (2yr), and individuals age 3 and above (age 3+). Because KB is a small subpopulation, capture and recovery data were very sparse, and we identified a limited number of relatively simple candidate sub-model structures.

We hypothesized that survival would differ among age classes and included age structure in all candidate models; however, we constrained yearling survival equal to 2-year old survival due to sparse data. Because coy are fully dependent on their mothers for their survival, we assumed that survival would not vary between male and female coy. However, we expected that survival would differ between sexes for older age classes, largely due to the 2 : 1 male-to-female

sex ratio in the harvest, so we examined structures in which (1)  $S$  differed between sexes for age 3+ bears only and (2)  $S$  differed between sexes for  $\text{yrl} / 2\text{yr}$  and age 3+ bears (additive effect of sex). Given the sparseness of the data, we did not examine year-to-year variability in  $S$ , or relationships between  $S$  and time-varying environmental covariates.

We examined seven sub-model structures for  $p$  (i.e., estimation is conditional on first capture). Estimates of  $p$  in the Burnham model reflect both the probability of an animal being located in the sampling area and thus available for recapture, and the probability of the animal being recaptured conditional on its presence in the sampling area (i.e., random temporary emigration is incorporated in  $p$ ; Burnham 1993). We hypothesized that female bears and dependent offspring (ages 0 and 1) may have a different  $p$  than independent male bears and evaluated models with this sex and age-class structure (family; sub-model structure 1). In addition, we suspected that search effort and sampling protocols may have differed between the two sampling epochs (1992-1997 vs. 2012-2014), so we considered structures with a temporal epoch effect (epoch; 2). Although the data were scant, we hypothesized that inter-annual variability in weather and sea-ice conditions may have resulted in  $p$  that varied significantly among years, so we also considered a fully time varying structure (time; 3). We considered structures with additive effects between (4) family and epoch and (5) family and time, as well as a structure including (6) an interactive effect between family and epoch. We also evaluated a null  $p$  sub-model (i.e., constant  $p$ ; 7).

Because some adult females in our 1990s sample were outfitted with satellite collars ( $n = 12$ ) that may have assisted in locating them, we created a binary radio covariate indicating whether a bear was theoretically available for recapture with the assistance of radio telemetry. We applied the covariate for 2 years post-collaring during the 1990s sampling period, unless

there was evidence that the collar was physically removed from the bear. We included the radio covariate in all structures and coded dependent offspring such that they had the same covariate structure as their mother. Satellite collars were not used to locate bears during the 2012 – 2014 period. Some individuals were not successfully genotyped ( $n = 25$ ) because either tissue samples were not located among the archives or the samples were inadequate to facilitate genotyping. These individuals had a reduced  $p$  during 2012 and 2013 (when physical capture and biopsy darting both occurred), but no probability of detection during 2014 (when bears only were sampled via biopsy darting). To reflect this, we created a binary ‘genotyped’ covariate (0 = successfully genotyped; 1 = not genotyped) and included it in all model structures for 2012 and 2013; for non-genotyped individuals, we fixed  $p = 0$  in 2014. We also fixed  $p = 0$  during 1998 – 2011, when there was no live recapture sampling.

The reporting ( $r$ ) parameter represents the probability that a dead bear is identified and reported to authorities. Here,  $r$  reflected the proportion of mortality that can be attributed to reported harvest (including bears killed to protect life or property). We hypothesized that  $r$  would vary among age classes (yrl / 2yr and age 3+) and by sex for age 3+ individuals (sub-model structure 1) due to harvest regulations, including sex-selective harvest (2 males : 1 female). Because recovery data were sparse ( $\leq 5$  total recoveries per year; typically 0 – 2 recoveries per year), we did not consider models with annual variation in  $r$ , but we created an alternative structure which included an additive effect for time period (pre-2006; 2006 - 2013) for age 3+ individuals to reflect the changes in harvest and improvements in the Greenlandic reporting system over the past decade (structure 2). There were no records of cubs-of-the-year marked in KB harvested during the first year post marking, so we fixed  $r_{coy}$  to 0. Because only harvest data through 2013 were included in analyses, we fixed  $r$  to 0 for all age classes in 2014.

We hypothesized that polar bears may permanently emigrate from KB, based on the semi-discreteness of subpopulation boundaries (Taylor et al. 2001) and the spatial distribution of historical recapture and recovery data. Thus, we chose to estimate the  $F$  parameter, rather than assume that there was no permanent emigration and fix  $F$  to 1, as done in previous studies (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, 2008, 2009). We considered structures in which (1)  $F$  was estimated as constant across all sex and age classes (constant) and (2)  $F$  was different for a combined class of coy, yrl / 2yr, and age 3+ females vs. age 3+ males (3+ males).

We constructed the most generalized model (excluding individual covariates) and used the median  $\hat{c}$  method, as implemented in Program MARK, to estimate over-dispersion. Because results suggested the data were not significantly over-dispersed (i.e.,  $\hat{c}$  was approximately 1), we proceeded with model selection via  $AIC_c$ . Given the relatively small set of candidate sub-model structures, we constructed all possible combinations of candidate sub-models.

We evaluated models via  $AIC_c$  and model-averaged parameters for models with  $\Delta AIC_c < 4$  (Burnham and Anderson 2002), based on an initial sensitivity analysis. Our estimates of survival reflected harvest mortality, so we derived estimates of natural survival as  $S + r * (1 - S)$  (following, e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, 2008, Peacock et al. 2013) and estimated variance via the delta method (following Taylor et al. 2008). This equation relies on several key assumptions. First, it assumes harvest of all marked bears is reported; under-reporting of the harvest, which has been documented (Government of Nunavut, unpublished data), would lead to negative bias in estimates of natural survival. However, this derivation of natural survival also assumes that harvest mortality is completely additive, i.e., no bears that are harvested would otherwise die during a given interval. In contrast to under-reporting of marked bears in the harvest, a violation of the assumption of additive mortality would result in positive bias in

estimates of natural survival.

For highly supported models, we used a generalized Horvitz-Thompson estimator,  $\hat{N} = \frac{n}{\hat{p}}$ , where  $n$  is the number captured in group  $i$  and  $\hat{p}$  is the recapture probability for group  $i$ , to generate estimates of abundance by attribute group (e.g., family group status) for the yrl / 2yr and age 3+ classes. Because some coy were not marked during the 2012 – 2014 sampling period and estimates of  $n$  and  $p$  did not accurately reflect this age class, we incorporated coy by estimating the number of age 3+ females with coy litters via a Horvitz-Thompson estimator and multiplying by mean observed coy litter size. To obtain an overall estimate of abundance for KB by year, we summed individual estimates across groups. Following previous work (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, 2008, Peacock et al. 2013), we estimated variances for total abundance estimates and incorporated variances and covariances (calculated in MARK) as well as variance of mean litter sizes via the delta method (Seber 1982, Powell 2007) using R (R Core Team 2015) package emdbook (Bolker 2016). We model-averaged estimates of total abundance using model weights for recapture probabilities and variances obtained with the delta method. We calculated mean overall estimates of abundance by sampling epoch and estimated variance using the delta method. We excluded 1993 – 1994 and 2012 from these mean estimates given the initial expansions of the sampling frame between 1992 and 1995 and the long interval without live recaptures preceding 2012, respectively (i.e., estimation of subpopulation size in 2012 was based on estimated recapture rates of bears marked during the 1990s applied to newly encountered bears in 2012).

### 10.3. Results

We recorded a total of 277 initial captures, 89 recaptures, and 24 dead recoveries over the

course of the 23-year study period (Table 10.1). Markedly more bears were captured in the eastern regions of KB (i.e., off Humboldt Glacier in Northwest Greenland) during 2012 – 2014 than during the 1990s (Figures 10.2 and 10.5). Capture data were particularly sparse during the 1990s, although sampling in 1995 yielded significantly more captures than other years in the 1990s (Table 10.1). Similarly, very few bears were recovered via the harvest during the 2000s (Table 10.1). Notably, no males initially marked in KB during the 1990s were recaptured during 2012 – 2014, and only one male marked in the 1990s was reported in the harvest after 2002. Although no COY were sampled in 2014 (all sampling was conducted via biopsy darting), we observed a total of 23 COY with their mothers that year. In addition, 3 COY with their mothers were not biopsy darted in both 2012 and 2013. Mean observed COY litter size during 2012 – 2014 was 1.60 (SD: 0.5).

The most highly supported models included an additive effect of sex for the  $yrl / 2yr$  and  $3+$  age classes for  $S$  and a temporal effect (break at 2006) for  $r$  (Table 10.2). Although there was not clear support for specific structures for modeling  $p$ , complex (e.g., fully time-varying) structures for  $p$  were not supported in model selection, which was not surprising given the sparseness of the data. For model-averaging, we included 12 of 56 total models (cumulative model weight = 0.76).

Estimates of total survival of males were markedly lower than females for both the  $yrl / 2yr$  and  $3+$  age classes, although we note that the additive effect in  $S$  was shared across age classes and not estimated separately for  $yrl/2yr$  vs.  $3+$  bears (Table 10.3). This pattern was also evident in estimates of unharvested survival ( $yrl / 2yr$  females: 0.74, SE: 0.15;  $yrl / 2yr$  males: 0.54, SE: 0.17; age  $3+$  females, 2006 – 2013: 0.96, SE: 0.04 and  $3+$  males, 2006 – 2013: 0.88, 0.05). As hypothesized, recent (2006 - 2013) estimates of  $r$  were less than 1992-2005 values,

although  $r$  did not significantly differ among age and sex classes (Table 10.3). Estimates of  $F$  suggest relatively strong fidelity to the springtime study area for females and dependent bears ( $F$ : 0.98, SE: 0.04) as well as age 3+ males ( $F$ : 0.96, SE: 0.07).

Annual estimates of abundance largely reflected the variability in sample sizes among years (e.g., 1995; Table 10.4, *cf.* Table 10.1). The estimated mean total abundance of the KB subpopulation during the 1995 – 1997 period was 224 (SE: 40; 95% CI: 145 – 303). The estimated mean total abundance for 2013 – 2014 was 357 (92; 221 – 493).

#### 10.4. Discussion

We used a combination of physical and genetic mark-recapture techniques, including live recaptures and dead recoveries, to estimate demographic parameters of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation over a 23-year study period. Our estimate of abundance from the 1990s (224, 95% CI 145 – 303; averaged over 1995 – 1997) was consistent with previous analyses (164, averaged over 1994 - 1997; Taylor et al. 2008). Although the 2010s point estimate is ~36% greater than the 1990s estimate of Taylor et al. (2008), from the 1990s; this difference is largely attributable to our decision to derive a mean estimate of abundance from only 1995 – 1997. The sampling frame expanded during the 1990s, progressing northward and eastward in incremental steps such that, in the initial years, only a portion of KB was surveyed (Figure 10.2). Hence, we calculated mean abundance estimates by epoch only during periods when sampling was consistent and the sampling frames were generally comparable (1990s: 1995 – 1997). By contrast, Taylor et al.'s (2008) estimate was calculated as the mean estimated from 1994 – 1997; including 1994 in our estimate would reduce our point estimate from 224 to 198.

The 2013 – 2014 estimate of abundance suggests 357 (221 – 493) bears currently use KB

in springtime (i.e., the Kane Basin super-population; Kendall et al. 1997), and the current point estimate is higher than the historical estimate. Based on a randomization procedure that assumed normal sampling distributions for abundance estimates, the mean difference between the estimate of KB abundance for 2013-2014 and the estimate for 1995-1997 was approximately 133 bears (standard deviation of the difference  $\approx$  80 bears), with 95% of the sampling distribution suggesting that population change between the two time periods could have been positive. This result suggests a stable to increasing subpopulation and is consistent with data on movements (Chapter 9), reproductive output (Chapter 12), and body condition (Chapter 13), suggesting that Kane Basin is currently a healthy subpopulation. However, we encourage caution in interpretation. We attempted to mitigate the impacts of apparent changes in sampling frames, particularly during the 1990s, by excluding 1993 and 1994 from our mean estimate of abundance during the 1990s. However, we were unable to address potential changes in survey effort between the 1995 – 1997 and 2012 – 2014 epochs.

Sampling occurred in the eastern regions of the KB subpopulation (i.e., near the Humboldt Glacier) during 1995 – 1997 and 2012 – 2014. When the eastern parts of Kane Basin (i.e., the areas east of the mid-sector line in the Nares Strait-Kane Basin area off the Humboldt Glacier) were surveyed in 1994 and 1995, only few signs of polar bear activity (i.e., tracks) were observed there and consequently only a few bears were tagged (0 in 1994 and 4 in 1995; E. Born, pers. obs., Taylor et al. 2001). Similarly, no bears were found and tagged there in 1996 and only 3 in 1997 (Taylor et al. 2001). The apparent very low densities of polar bears in eastern KB was assumed to reflect a long-term avoidance response because eastern KB has been hunted relatively intensively by hunters from the Qaanaaq region and in particular after it no longer became permitted for Greenland hunters to hunt polar bears in Canadian territory in the late



1960s. The presence of ringed seals in eastern KB was noted during the surveys in the 1990s and it was concluded that these areas were favourable habitat for polar bears (E. Born, pers. obs., Taylor et al. 2001).

However, it cannot be precluded that, this difference between the 1990s and the 2000s in the spatial distribution of bears, to a certain extent reflect some differences in sampling protocols, including increased survey intensity near the Humboldt Glacier and more uniform distribution of effort during 2012 – 2014. However, during both periods relative allocation of survey effort to a certain extent was decided based on assumptions of what was suitable polar bear habitat (i.e., areas with anticipated polar bear occurrence and/or areas with observed signs of polar bear habitat). In the 2000s large areas in central and southern KB with relatively open pack ice were not surveyed although satellite telemetry (Chapter 2) and aerial surveys (Heide-Jørgensen et al. 2013) indicate the presence of polar bears in this habitat albeit likely few. Whereas in the 1990s when the spring sea ice in KB was more consolidated (E. Born, pers. obs; Chapter 9) areas with little or no signs of polar bear activity in the eastern parts were surveyed less intensively.

It should be mentioned that sea-ice dynamics in Kane Basin also have changed since the 1990s (Chapter 9), limiting access of hunters from Greenland to the eastern parts of the region (Born et al. 2011) possibly resulting in an increased occurrence of polar bears in this area. Hence, we hypothesize that these differences in sea-ice dynamics and associated change in hunting pressure have led to the apparent shift in the distribution of bears toward the eastern parts of the Nares Strait-Kane Basin region.

We note that the Horvitz-Thompson estimator used to generate estimates of abundance in Kane Basin yielded biologically implausible rates of growth from 1994 to 1995 (119 – 318),

1995 to 1996 (318 – 189), and 2012 to 2013 (221 – 328; Table 10.4). Although the apparent changes in sampling frame (and thus the definition of the effective study population) from 1994 to 1995 may contribute to this finding in part, this result is primarily an artifact of the estimator itself. Horvitz-Thompson (H-T) estimators are calculated as  $\hat{N} = \frac{n}{p}$  for each group (e.g., age class and sex), and the total abundance estimate is derived by summing estimates across all groups. As such, H-T estimators are sensitive to sample size, particularly if recapture probabilities are estimated as temporal constants. Because data for this analysis were very sparse and models specifying inter-annual variation in estimates of recapture probability were not supported, our Horvitz-Thompson estimates of abundance are influenced by variation in annual sample size of captured bears ( $n$ ). We attempted to address this issue by integrating annual random effects for estimating recapture probability with complementary Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) analyses, but this approach did not resolve the issue. Given this limitation, we do not recommend interpreting inter-annual variation in estimates of abundance, and suggest that the larger estimate of abundance in 2013-2014 may be partially attributed to larger sample sizes in those years, compared to 1995-1997.

Our estimates of survival for dependent bears and age 3+ females are consistent with previous work in Kane Basin (Taylor et al. 2008), and estimates of unharvested survival rates of independent females appear capable of supporting positive subpopulation growth (Regehr et al. 2015). Our estimates of age 3+ male survival (present analysis: age 3+ males, 0.87, SE 0.06) are lower than previous work in KB (Taylor et al. 2008: age 5+ males, 0.96, SE: 0.05) but consistent with estimates of adult male survival derived in some other studies (e.g., Stirling et al. 2011, Peacock et al. 2012). We further note that data on males were particularly scant in this study (Table 10.1): no male bears initially marked in the 1990s were subsequently recaptured in the

2000s, and very few individuals were reported in the harvest over the past 15 years. We are uncertain if the disparity in estimates of male survival between our study and Taylor et al. (2008) reflects differences in modeling approaches, such as the broader age class designations in the present study and consideration of different model structures (unlike Taylor et al. [2008], we did not consider a structure in which  $S$  was estimated as constant between the sexes for age 3+ individuals); our inclusion of longer-term data; a disproportionate impact of the changing environment on males; reduced fidelity of males to the study area that was not effectively captured by our model-based estimates of the fidelity ( $F$ ) parameter given the paucity of recovery data; under-reporting of male bears in the harvest; or some combination thereof.

Although we calculated estimates of natural survival following previous studies (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005), we note that the formula used to derive these estimates [ $S + r * (1 - S)$ ] makes simplifying assumptions that can introduce bias into estimates of unharvested  $S$  under some conditions, although the impacts of using this vs. an alternative equation is likely minimal for KB data due to high estimates of  $S$  and low estimates of  $r$ . The documented under-reporting of marked bears in the harvest leads to an underestimation of natural survival, but this may be offset, to some extent, by a likely violation of the assumption that harvest mortality is completely additive. For example, Taylor et al. (2008) estimated natural survival for both adult females and males to be 0.997, meaning that virtually all mortality of adult (age 5+) bears in Kane Basin during 1992 - 1998 resulted from harvest, and <1 in 300 adult bears would die annually in the absence of harvest. Although Taylor et al. (2008) did not report their estimates of  $r$ , back calculating from survival rates in their Table 3 yields unrealistically high estimates of  $r = 0.91$  for adult females and  $r = 0.93$  for adult males, so their estimates of natural and harvest mortality should be treated cautiously.

Changing sea-ice conditions, a reduction in accessibility of Kane Basin to hunters from Canada and (in the Humboldt Glacier region) Greenland, and the implementation of a quota in Greenland have contributed to a net reduction in harvest since the 1990s (Chapter 8). This decline is reflected in estimates of the reporting parameter, as  $r$  is estimated lower for the period from 2006 – 2014 than 1992 – 2005 (Table 10.3). We note, however, that under-reporting of harvest, which anecdotally appears to increase with greater marker age (Chapter 8), also may contribute to lower estimates of  $r$  during 2006 – 2013, especially given the 14-year interval without live recaptures.

Despite the sparseness of the data and the unusual study design (6-year and 3-year live capture sessions connected by a 14-year period with dead recoveries only), we were able to generate estimates of  $F$  that seem biologically realistic (age 3+ males: 0.96; females and dependent bears: 0.98): polar bears show strong seasonal fidelity to the region in which they were captured, but a small proportion of individuals permanently emigrate to other subpopulations. These estimates appear consistent with findings from satellite telemetry data and capture records (Taylor et al. 2001, Chapters 2 and 9).

Our study indicates that there has been no decline in the size of the KB subpopulation. These findings are in accordance with TEK (Born et al. 2011).

Using estimates of subpopulation size in KB and vital parameters from the 1990s, York et al. (2016) modeled a decline in KB with an estimated subpopulation size of zero in 2013. According to York et al. (2016:9,18) the projected decline is consistent with TEK. It is mentioned that KB has been subject to chronic long-term overharvest and would not persist if it did not receive immigrants from adjacent subpopulations (Ibid.). As basis for the TEK information York et al. (2016) cite COSEWIC (2008) and M. Taylor (pers. comm. 1986-2008) in

the text, and COSEWIC (2008), CWS (2009) and PBTC (2014) in their table 2b but not a comprehensive TEK study in which NW Greenland polar bear hunters were interviewed (Born et al. 2011).

During this interview survey in Greenland experienced polar bear hunters who had been hunting in Kane Basin were of the opinion that polar bears in this region had expanded their range. Previously the hunters had to travel north to Washington Land (*ca.* 80° N) to find bears, whereas nowadays they only have to go as far as Inglefield Land (*ca.* 78° 30' N) to hunt polar bears in the eastern Nares Strait-Kane Basin region. Their reason for this was because “the bears have come closer” (Born et al. 2011:75,79). It was mentioned that previously polar bears were scarce in the eastern Kane Basin area (i.e., in front of the Humboldt Glacier) but now had expanded their range from Ellesmere Island eastward to the Nares Strait-Kane Basin region (ibid:80). Some of the interviewees were of the opinion that this change represented an increase in the number of polar bears. It was also mentioned that the hunting pressure in Kane Basin had decreased because poor sea-ice conditions (i.e., lack of dense sea ice) had made travels with dog sleds north more difficult (Born et al. 2011). Hence, information from experienced polar bear hunters in NW Greenland indicates that the KB-polar bear subpopulation has expanded its distribution area and increased in size which is in accordance with our study.

This study and concurrent research in the neighboring Baffin Bay subpopulation (Chapter 5) represent the first attempts to implement genetic mark-recapture for polar bears at a subpopulation-wide scale. The ability to successfully genotype bears from archived tissue and samples obtained via remote biopsy darting, combined with the ability to analyze data in well-established mark-recapture models, suggest that this approach is a promising tool for future polar bear inventories. However, there are some limitations of the technique including a generalized

age structure as bears are identified from the air. We opted for a conservative approach when designating age classes because there was inherent uncertainty in estimating age class remotely rather than aging via physical examination or with annular rings from an extracted tooth. However, our ability to accurately classify bears by age-class remotely (Chapter 5) suggests that future studies may be able to increase the resolution of age classification for obtaining estimates of survival (and other parameters), thus enhancing the utility of the technique.

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**Table 10.1.** Summary table of live captures and dead recoveries during the mark-recapture study of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation in Nunavut, Canada, and Greenland, 1992 – 2014. Shaded cells indicate that data are not possible due to an absence of marking or recapture.

	Initial captures						Live recaptures				Dead recoveries					
	Females			Males			Females		Males		Females			Males		
	Coy	Yrl / 2yr	3+	Coy	Yrl / 2yr	3+	Yrl / 2yr	3+	Yrl / 2yr	3+	Coy	Yrl / 2yr	3+	Coy	Yrl / 2yr	3+
1992	4	0	7	2	0	3					0	0	1	0	0	0
1993	1	3	6	3	1	8	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1994	2	0	9	3	0	4	1	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
1995	12	3	21	5	2	13	0	7	0	6	0	0	1	0	0	1
1996	5	2	8	2	2	4	1	7	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1
1997	0	4	4	3	1	3	1	8	0	8	0	1	1	0	0	2
1998												0	3		0	2
1999													2			2
2000													0			0
2001													1			0
2002													0			1
2003													2			0
2004													1			0
2005													0			0
2006													0			0
2007													0			0
2008													0			0
2009													0			0
2010													0			1
2011													0			0
2012	2	3	19	1	4	11		2		0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2013	6	4	20	2	2	19	0	9	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
2014	0	2	21	0	1	10	2	12	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>

**Table 10.2.** Model selection results ( $< \Delta AIC_c$  4) from analysis of mark-recapture-recovery data from the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation, 1992 – 2014. Coy = cubs of the year. Yrl = yearlings and 2-year olds. 3+ = bears aged 3 and older. For  $p$ , family = females / dependent bears and independent males (2 age / sex classes); and epoch = sampling period (1992 – 1997; 2012 – 2014). For  $r$ , time = 1992 – 2005 and 2006 – 2013.

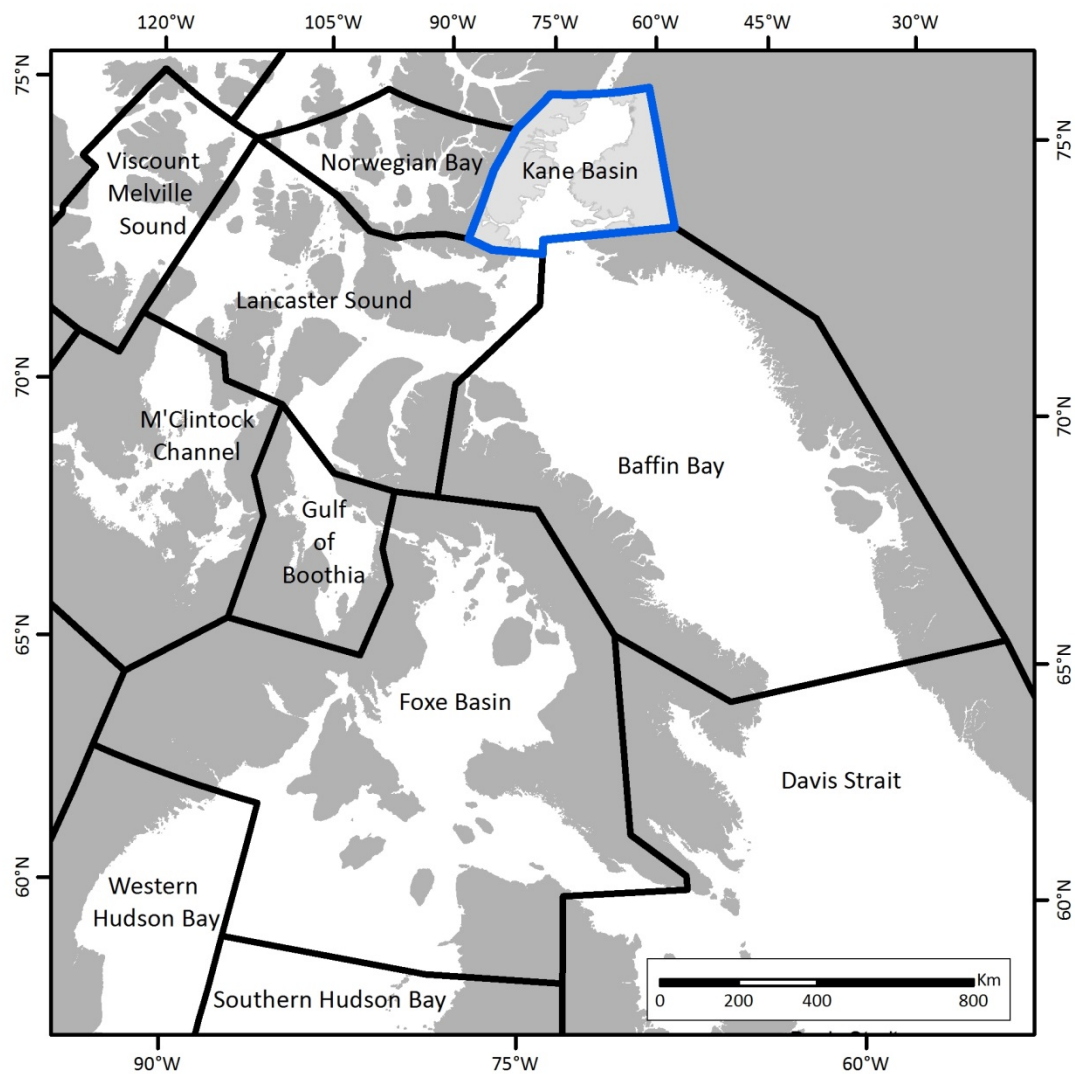
Model Structures				Parameters	$\Delta AIC_c$	AICc Weights	Deviance
$S$	$p$	$r$	$F$				
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	Family	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	13	0	0.23	723.71
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	Family	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	14	1.22	0.13	722.76
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	family + epoch	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	14	1.23	0.13	722.77
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	Constant	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	12	1.88	0.09	727.74
coy, yrl, 3+(sex)	Family	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	13	2.19	0.08	725.90
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	family + epoch	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	15	2.57	0.06	721.94
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	family * epoch	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	15	2.62	0.06	721.99
coy, yrl, 3+(sex)	Family	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	14	2.83	0.06	724.38
coy, yrl, 3+(sex)	Constant	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	12	3.06	0.05	728.92
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	Epoch	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	13	3.37	0.04	727.08
coy, yrl, 3+(sex)	family + epoch	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	Constant	14	3.45	0.04	724.99
coy, yrl, 3+(add sex with yrl)	Constant	yrl, 3+(sex + time)	coy yrl 3+ F, 3+ M	13	3.90	0.03	727.61

**Table 10.3.** Model averaged ( $<\Delta 4$  AICc) parameter estimates for the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation obtained from mark-recapture study, 1992 – 2014.

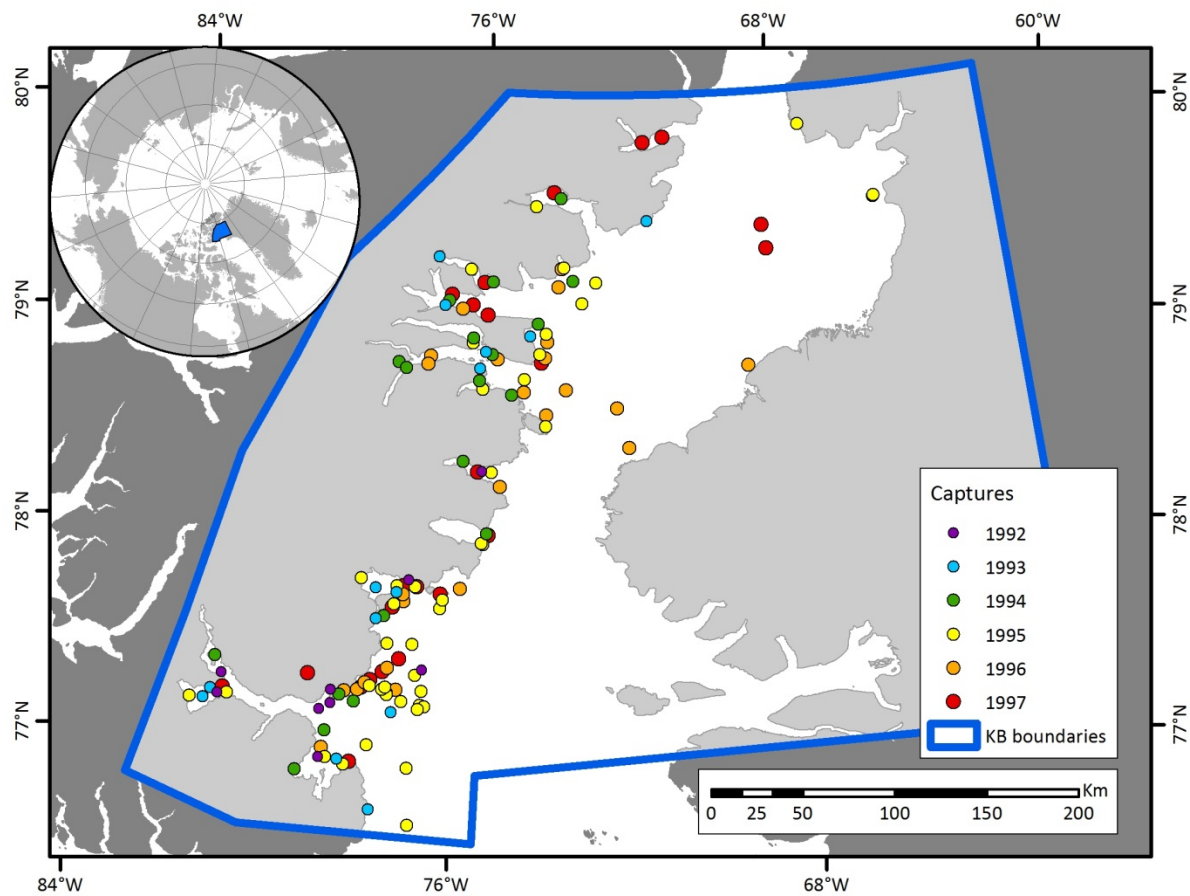
Parameter	Class	Estimate (SE)
Total Survival ( <i>S</i> )		
	Cubs of the year	0.45 (0.15)
	Yearlings / 2-year old females	0.73 (0.13)
	Yearlings / 2-year old males	0.52 (0.17)
	3+ females	0.95 (0.04)
	3+ males	0.87 (0.06)
Reporting ( <i>r</i> )		
	Yearlings / 2-year olds	0.04 (0.04)
	3+ females, 1992 – 2005	0.42 (0.26)
	3+ females, 2006 - 2013	0.09 (0.08)
	3+ males, 1992 – 2005	0.32 (0.12)
	3+ males, 2006 – 2013	0.06 (0.05)
Fidelity ( <i>F</i> )		
	Cubs of the year, yearlings, 2-year olds, and 3+ females	0.98 (0.04)
	3+ males	0.96 (0.07)

**Table 10.4.** Model averaged ( $<\Delta 4$  AICc) estimates of abundance ( $\hat{N} \pm \text{SE}$ ; [95% Confidence Interval]) of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation from mark-recapture study, 1992 – 2014.

1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	2012	2013	2014
$120 \pm 19$ (83-156)	$119 \pm 21$ (77-160)	$318 \pm 53$ (214-429)	$189 \pm 36$ (119-259)	$164 \pm 28$ (110-218)	$221 \pm 41$ (141-301)	$328 \pm 60$ (211-445)	$385 \pm 78$ (233-537)

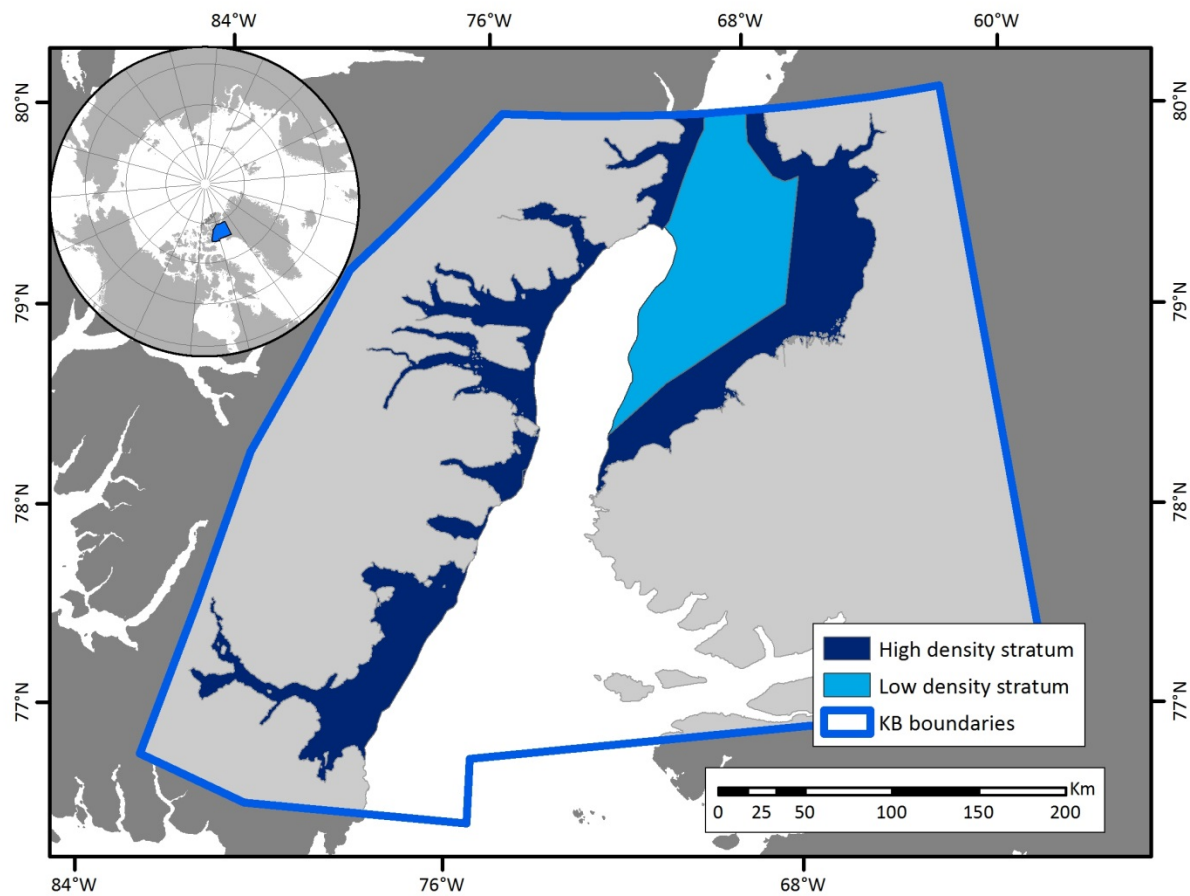


**Figure 10.1.** The Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation is located between Nunavut, Canada and Greenland and is regarded as belonging to the Arctic Archipelago region.

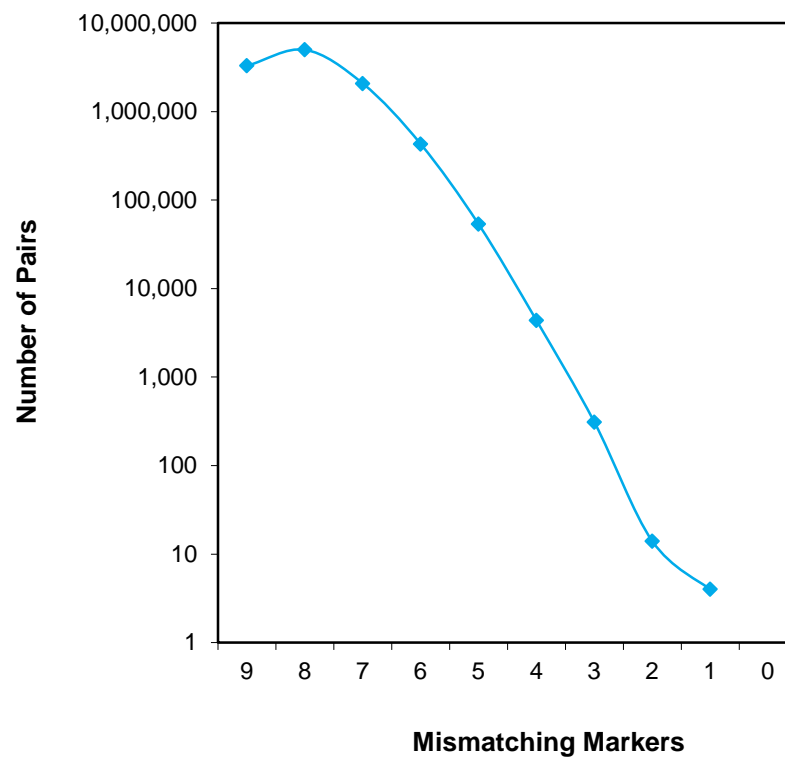


**Figure 10.2.** Locations of polar bears captured in the Kane Basin subpopulation during springtime, 1993 – 1995 and 1997. Kane Basin is highlighted in blue in the inset.

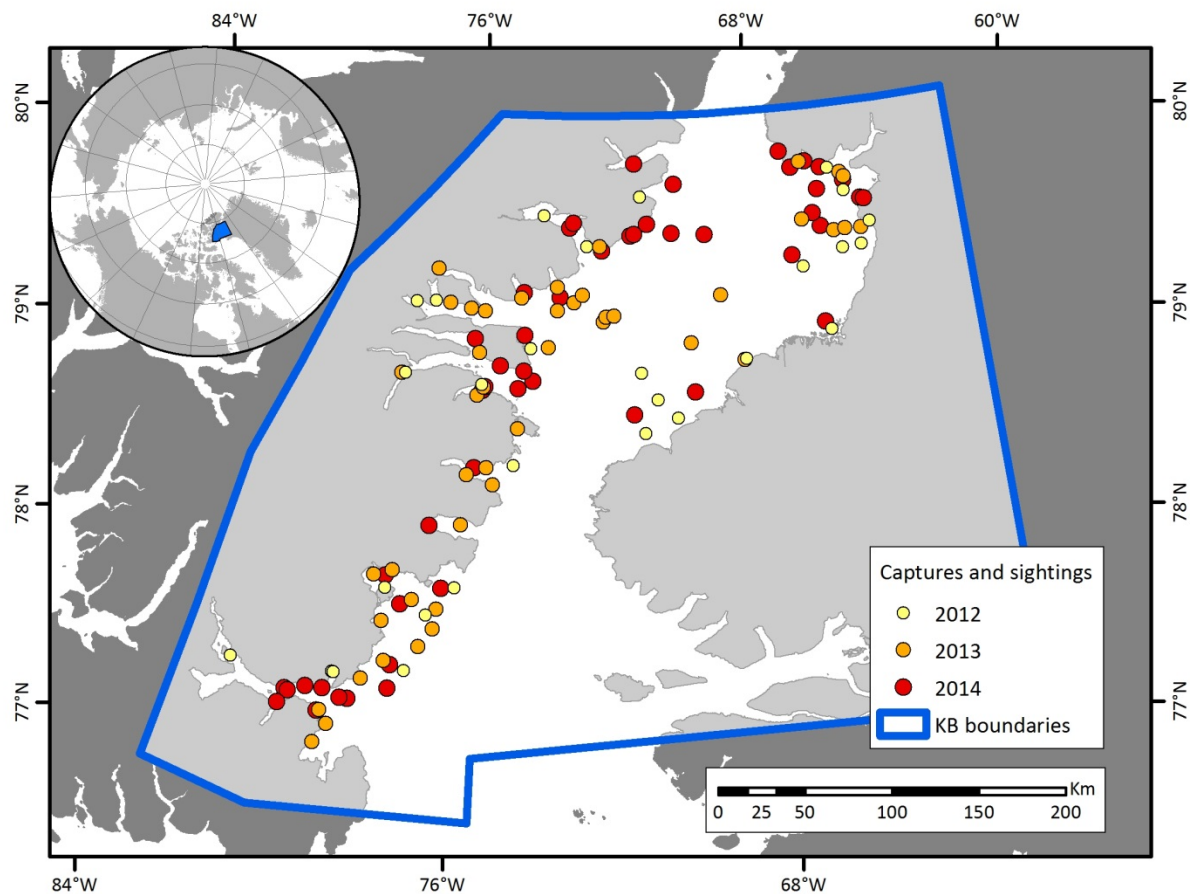




**Figure 10.3.** Sampling strata for genetic mark-recapture and aerial survey of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation, April – May, 2014.



**Figure 10.4.** 9-locus mismatch distribution for 4,657 polar bears from Nunavut and the Greenland side of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin polar bear subpopulations.



**Figure 10.5.** Locations of polar bears sighted in Kane Basin during research in April and May, 2012 – 2014. Kane Basin is highlighted in blue in the inset. The North Water polynya varied among years, but in general, included the south-central portion of the subpopulation in all years. We did not sample sea ice in southeastern Kane Basin due to logistical constraints presented by the polynya and anticipated low densities.

## CHAPTER 11

### AERIAL SURVEY OF POLAR BEARS IN KANE BASIN

#### KEY FINDINGS

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- The estimate of abundance based on the springtime 2014 aerial survey in KB was 206 bears (95% lognormal CI: 83 - 510). However, due to insufficient coverage of offshore polar bear habitat this estimate is likely negatively biased.
  - Based on a randomization procedure that assumed normal sampling distributions for abundance estimates, the mean difference between the estimate of total abundance 2013-2014 from the MR study (357 bears, 95% CI = 221 – 493) and the aerial survey estimate was approximately 151 bears (standard deviation of the difference  $\approx$  127 bears), with 88% of the sampling distribution suggesting that the difference was positive (i.e., that the MR estimate was at least one bear larger than the aerial survey estimate).
  - Differences between MR and aerial survey point estimates in KB require caution when comparing results from different techniques conducted during springtime. Aerial surveys yield a snapshot estimate of abundance, whereas MR generates a super-population estimate reflecting all bears with a non-zero probability of detection during the study period. We suggest that the MR estimate is appropriate for use in management.
  - As shown also in other areas of the Arctic aerial surveys provide a useful tool for inventorying polar bear subpopulations and the method has been used on even larger subpopulations than KB in remote areas (e.g. the Barents Sea).
  - The springtime aerial survey was successfully implemented due to the small geographic area and a period of good weather, but precision could be improved by increasing survey effort to better estimate the detection function and by ensuring that the entire range of the subpopulation is covered.
  - Aerial surveys of polar bears that also range in areas with offshore loose drift ice and open water, like Kane Basin, should be conducted from fixed-winged aircraft with a longer endurance than the single-engine helicopter used in the present study. This allows for offshore polar bear habitat to be monitored and will result in a more accurate estimate of abundance.
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#### 11.1. Introduction

Physical mark-recapture has formed the basis for demographic studies of polar bears throughout the North American Arctic (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, 2008, Peacock et al. 2013).

Capture-based research has generated information on abundance, vital rates, and harvest management, and facilitated a variety of other studies, including assessments of body condition (e.g., Rode et al. 2012), movements, habitat use and spatial ecology (e.g., Durner et al. 2009, Cherry et al. 2013), and diet (e.g., Thiemann et al. 2008). Over the past decade, however, jurisdictions have invested substantial resources in the development and implementation of less invasive monitoring techniques, in part to better address social concerns regarding wildlife handling and immobilization. Genetic mark-recapture, one such alternative method, has been used to estimate the number of polar bears using whale carcasses in Alaska (Herreman and Peacock 2013) and, more recently, to estimate the abundance and associated vital rates for the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations (see Chapters 5 and 10, respectively). Aerial surveys also have been widely implemented, including studies conducted over land in seasonally ice-free subpopulations (Stapleton et al. 2014, 2016, Obbard et al. 2015) and over land and sea ice in the Barents Sea (Aars et al. 2009). Aerial surveys yield less detailed information on sex, age, body condition, and vital rates than both physical and genetic mark-recapture methods, but they can enable more frequent monitoring, an important consideration in the face of a rapidly changing Arctic.

Our objective was to evaluate the feasibility of estimating abundance with an aerial survey flown over springtime sea ice in the Kane Basin (KB) subpopulation. We designed and implemented the aerial survey to be conducted alongside a concurrent mark-recapture study in the KB subpopulation during 2014. This protocol ensured consistency in the sampling frames and study periods. It also allowed us to derive independent estimates of abundance from the two techniques, enabling us to directly compare and assess the results of the 2 methods. This important step is necessary to properly integrate population estimates derived from different

survey techniques. Although research elsewhere in has facilitated broad comparisons between mark-recapture and aerial survey methods (Western Hudson Bay – Stapleton et al. 2014, Lunn et al. 2016; Southern Hudson Bay – Obbard 2008, Obbard et al. 2015), the work in Kane Basin represents the first study in which an aerial survey was designed and implemented with a sampling frame identical to a simultaneous mark-recapture study. Aerial surveys yield snapshot estimates of abundance (i.e., the number of bears occupying the survey area during the study period; Buckland et al. 2001), whereas mark-recapture generates a super-population estimate reflecting all bears with a non-zero probability of detection during the study period (including individuals that are currently outside the survey area due to temporary emigration; Kendall et al. 1997). Because there is a lack of geographic closure among polar bear subpopulations such that they are only partially discrete (Taylor et al. 2001, Chapter 9), we hypothesized that our aerial survey-based estimate would be smaller than our mark-recapture-based estimate.

## **11.2. Materials and Methods**

### **Study Area**

The KB subpopulation covers ~150,000 km<sup>2</sup> and spans portions of Nunavut, Canada, including Ellesmere Island, as well as northwestern Greenland (boundaries evaluated in Taylor et al. 2001; Figure 10.1). However, the boundaries of the KB subpopulation encompasses a substantial amount of land and glaciers so that the essential sea-ice polar bear habitat only amounts to less than one half of the area enclosed by the borders of the management unit (*cf.* 11.2). The subpopulation ranges over Kane Basin, Nares Strait, Smith Sound and adjacent fjords on eastern Ellesmere Island and Northwest Greenland (the Qaanaaq areas). It is bounded to the north by the Arctic Basin subpopulation (via the Kennedy Channel), to the south by the Baffin

Bay (BB) and Lancaster Sound (LS) subpopulations, and to the west by Norwegian Bay (NW; PBSG 2010). The KB subpopulation is regarded as belonging to the Arctic archipelago ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008); sea ice remains present in the northern range (i.e., Nares Strait-Kane Basin) throughout the year, largely due to the movement of polar pack ice from Arctic Basin, and reaches a minimum in late summer. However, sea-ice conditions have changed markedly in the Kane Basin region in recent decades (Born et al. 2011; Figure 9.2). KB is partially connected to neighboring subpopulations; particularly notable interchange occurs with BB and LS. The North Water polynya, a large area of open water in northern Baffin Bay and southern Smith Sound, is a significant regional geographic feature that exhibits substantial intra- and inter-annual variability in spatial extent and is thought to form a barrier between KB and BB – LS.

### Field Sampling

Using a helicopter (Bell 206 LongRanger), we implemented a line-transect aerial survey over springtime sea ice in the KB subpopulation during 28 April – 12 May 2014. To efficiently allocate effort and ensure that the study area was sampled as comprehensively as possible, we stratified the subpopulation into high- and low-density areas based on observations of polar bears during 2012 and 2013 mark-recapture surveys (i.e., presumed densities; see Chapter 10). Strata conformed to general landscape features and ice types: the high-density stratum included landfast ice along the coastline and within fjords as well as nearshore pack ice within ~30 km of the nearest land mass (~18,870 km<sup>2</sup>), whereas the low-density stratum included pack ice located farther offshore (~9,110 km<sup>2</sup>; Figure 11.1). Since the survey was conducted after adult females had left dens, we assumed that no bears were located on land during the study period. We used

GIS layers from Greenland and Nunavut to delineate the landward extent (i.e., coastline) of the study area. We delineated the extent of available habitat by approximating the edge of the North Water polynya with Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS; <http://modis.gsfc.nasa.gov/>) images (1 km resolution). The polynya's boundaries can change rapidly, so we delineated the extent of the polynya adjacent to the section surveyed on a particular day using MODIS imagery from that day, or from the closest date possible when same-day imagery was unclear due to atmospheric conditions. We also examined the delineated study area in relation to weekly regional sea-ice charts produced by the Canadian Ice Service (<https://www.ec.gc.ca/glaces-ice/>). During sampling, we collected GPS waypoints at the edge of the polynya to verify delineation. We did not sample in the polynya due to safety considerations. Polar bears occur in the polynya area (Heide-Jørgensen et al. 2013) but ice conditions in spring 2014 suggested that it was not suitable springtime habitat for polar bears due to its thin, forming (i.e., new and grey) ice and expansive open water (*cf.* Sahanatien and Derocher 2012). We also did not survey the sea ice in the fjords (~3,245 km<sup>2</sup>; Figure 11.1) of the populated Qaanaaq area in NW Greenland (i.e., in the eastern parts of the North Water polynya) because hunting pressure for marine mammals in these areas is generally high and consequently “resident” polar bears do not exist in the Qaanaaq area (Born et al. 2011, E. Born, pers. obs.).

Aerial transects were systematically spaced at 6-km and 18-km width intervals in the high- and low-density strata, respectively, based on anticipated encounter rates and available resources. We arranged transects in an east – west direction in open areas, but oriented them perpendicular to fjords (i.e., across the widths of fjords) to improve variance estimation (i.e., more numerous short transects) and reduce bias (i.e., sighting distances did not reflect potential density gradients, with highest densities along the sides of fjords; Figure 11.2).



During line-transect sampling, we surveyed at an altitude of ~120 m and groundspeed of ~150 km / hr. We sampled from most planned transects and included some ferry flights (during which we sampled) that were random with respect to the distribution of bears and presumed density gradients (i.e., highest densities near the polynya edge and along the sides of fjords) in analyses. Although many groups were observed during flights between consecutive transects, these typically occurred near the sides of fjords. As such, observations may have reflected a density gradient as well as the probability of detection and were thus inappropriate to include in distance sampling analyses (Stapleton et al. 2014).

We collected aerial survey data with mark-recapture distance sampling protocols (Laake and Borchers 2004, see also Stapleton et al. 2014, 2016). Two front (including the pilot) and two rear observers comprised the first and second capture periods, respectively, and teams of observers worked independently until both groups were afforded a full opportunity to observe a bear. After announcing a sighting, we flew off-transect to record the bear's initial location with a GPS, and we later estimated distance from transects in a GIS (Marques et al. 2006). During off-transect flights, we flew to within ~5 – 10 m of bears to obtain a tissue sample via biopsy darting for genetic analysis (see Chapter 10) and to estimate sex and age class of the bear. For each sighting, we recorded 3 covariates that potentially impacted detection probability: 1) habitat structure within a 30-m radius (smooth / low structure or moderate to high structure; i.e., smooth versus rough ice); 2) visibility (good or poor, due to fog, glare or precipitation); and 3) light conditions (i.e., cloud cover; clear: 0 – 25%; partly cloudy: 25 – 50%; mostly cloudy: 50 – 75%; or overcast: 75 – 100%).

### Statistical Analyses

We analyzed line-transect data using distance sampling, which fits a function to observational data to describe how detection changes with increasing distance from the sampling transect (Buckland et al. 2001). We initially intended to use double observer (i.e., mark-recapture) distance sampling for analyses, but small sample sizes precluded this approach. We defined clusters as discrete groups of bears with non-independent detection probabilities (i.e., an adult female with 1 or more offspring or a breeding pair). We first examined a left-truncated data set (i.e., 75 m was subtracted from all observations; observations within 75 m were censored to account for blind spots directly beneath the helicopter; e.g., Borchers et al. 2006, Stapleton et al. 2014) to evaluate distance sampling's fundamental assumption of complete detection on the transect line (Buckland et al. 2001). Because these results indicated that the probability of detection by at least one observer was >96% at the adjusted transect line, we considered this assumption to be approximately met and proceeded with analyses including all observations (i.e., data were not left-truncated).

We completed analyses in the mark-recapture distance sampling (MRDS) engine of Program DISTANCE 6.2 (Thomas et al. 2010) and modeled the survey data as a single-observer study. We examined half-normal and hazard rate key functions and used multiple covariate distance sampling (Marques and Buckland 2003) to include a maximum of 1 covariate per model due to sample size constraints. We condensed light conditions into a binary covariate (0 – 25% cloud cover; >25% cloud cover) due to underrepresentation of some values. We considered each transect the sampling unit for variance estimation and used the Innes et al. (2002) method to estimate variance associated with global density and overall abundance.

### 11.3. Results

We surveyed 4,160 km of transects, including 3,850 km along 234 transects in the high-density stratum and 610 km along 14 transects in the low-density stratum. We observed 29 groups of polar bears (Figure 11.2), including 49 total bears (30 independent bears); cub-of-the-year and yearling litter sizes in this sample averaged 1.55 (SD: 0.5,  $n = 11$ ) and 1.0 (SD: 0.0,  $n = 2$ ), respectively. We right-truncated sightings data at 1,400 m to improve model fit and parsimony (Buckland et al. 2001), censoring one observation of an independent bear at >3,500 m, leaving 28 groups for estimating the detection function and abundance; 27 of these sightings occurred in the high-density stratum.

Sighting distance was not correlated with polar bear group size ( $r = -0.10$ ,  $P = 0.61$ ), so we used mean group size for abundance estimation. Histograms summarizing sightings distances indicated strong-support for a distance-based detection function (Figure 11.3), and all highly supported distance sampling models indicated adequate goodness-of-fit (chi-squared, Cramér-von Mises and Komolgorov-Smirnov tests:  $P > 0.05$ ). The most highly supported model (half-normal key function) suggested that light conditions (cloud cover) affected detection probability (Figure 11.4). However, the small number of observations (see Buckland et al. 2001: at least 60 – 80 sightings are recommended for estimating the detection function) resulted in uncertainty in density and abundance estimation, and a model with a hazard rate key function had nearly equivalent support and estimated much higher densities (Figure 11.3, Table 11.1). Thus, we elected to model-average (Burnham and Anderson 2002) the 2 most highly supported models and obtained a subpopulation-wide estimate of 206 bears (SE: 101; 95% lognormal CI: 83 – 510; CV: 49%) in 2014.

#### **11.4. Discussion**

The estimate of abundance based on the springtime 2014 aerial survey in KB was 206 bears (95% lognormal CI: 83 - 510). However, due to insufficient coverage of offshore polar bear habitat (vast areas of offshore habitat in the North Water Polynya was not surveyed) this estimate is likely negatively biased. The estimate of abundance obtained from the aerial survey was negatively biased by about 30% or more (see below).

Based on a randomization procedure that assumed normal sampling distributions for abundance estimates, the mean difference between the estimate of total abundance 2013-2014 from the MR study (357 bears, 95% CI = 221 – 493) and the aerial survey estimate was approximately 151 bears (standard deviation of the difference  $\approx$  127 bears), with 88% of the sampling distribution suggesting that the difference was positive (i.e., that the MR estimate was at least one bear larger than the aerial survey estimate).

Differences between MR and aerial survey point estimates in KB require caution when comparing results from different techniques conducted during springtime. Aerial surveys yield a snapshot estimate of abundance (i.e., the number of bears occupying the survey area during the study period), whereas MR generates a super-population estimate reflecting all bears with a non-zero probability of detection during the study period (including individuals that are currently outside the survey area due to temporary emigration) (Kendall et al. 1997). We suggest that the MR estimate is appropriate for use in management.

This finding reinforces that boundaries between subpopulations are not discrete, a result consistent with satellite telemetry (Taylor et al. 2001, Chapter 9) and capture and harvest records (e.g., Peacock et al. 2012, Chapter 10). Interchange among subpopulations is particularly prevalent during the springtime (Chapter 9), meaning that a large number of bears were likely exposed to sampling during the 3-year mark-recapture study period in the KB subpopulation.

These seasonal movement patterns contribute to the finding that the mark-recapture point estimate was ~85% greater than the aerial survey point estimate. We note that data used for the mark-recapture analysis were sparse and precluded implementing the Barker model (1997, 1999) to explicitly model temporary emigration. However, such an approach would enable a more direct comparison between methods by defining the mark-recapture estimate as pertaining to only those bears that were present in the study area and available for capture, rather than the entire super-population.

Although the aerial survey was not ideally designed (it relied up the use of a single-engine helicopter with limited range so that offshore habitat could not be surveyed), the KB subpopulation study provides the first opportunity to directly compare simultaneous mark-recapture and aerial survey studies. In Western Hudson Bay, estimates of abundance derived from mark-recapture and an aerial survey were similar (although the aerial survey snapshot estimate was somewhat greater than the mark-recapture super-population estimate), but differences in sampling frames limited inference (Stapleton et al. 2014, Lunn et al. 2016). Similarly, abundance estimates from an aerial survey and mark-recapture in Southern Hudson Bay were consistent, but several years elapsed between the inventories, and the mark-recapture estimate was adjusted upwards to reflect potential heterogeneity in capture probabilities and to account for un-sampled areas (Obbard 2008, Obbard et al. 2007, 2015). As jurisdictions incorporate alternative (non-capture based) methods for estimating abundance and monitoring populations, understanding the ability to compare results from different techniques will be critical to correctly interpreting status and trend (Stapleton et al. 2014). The differences in survey methods resulting in estimates of different “populations” (i.e., the MR estimate of the “super”-population versus the aerial survey’s real-time snapshot of abundance) suggest caution

when comparing results and assessing trends from different techniques implemented during the springtime, when polar bear movements among subpopulations are greatest.

We acknowledge that our estimate of abundance derived from the aerial survey is likely biased low. First, we did not sample the southeastern portion of the KB subpopulation and the large area of the North Water polynya because of logistical and safety considerations in a helicopter and the presumed relatively low densities of bears in these regions (Heide-Jørgensen et al. 2013). Satellite telemetry data indicated no collared bears ( $n = 20$  adult females) were present in the un-surveyed areas during the aerial survey sampling period (see also Chapter 9). However, the un-sampled regions covered extensive areas (sea ice near Qaanaaq: 3,245 km<sup>2</sup>, and the North Water polynya: 27,214 km<sup>2</sup>), such that even very low densities may significantly contribute to an overall estimate of abundance. This unsurveyed area in the North Water Polynya amounts to *ca.* 34% - 40% of the extension of the polynya (70,000-80,000 km<sup>2</sup>; Born et al. 2004 and references therein). Extrapolating our model-averaged estimate of density from the low-density stratum (3.39 bears / 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>) to the sea ice near Qaanaaq in southeastern KB yielded ~11 bears. For the North Water polynya, extrapolating a very low estimate of density (1.13 bears / 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>, or roughly a third of the estimated density used for the sea ice near Qaanaaq) added 31 bears.

During May 2009 and 2010, Heide-Jørgensen et al. (2013) conducted an aerial survey over the North Water Polynya (NOW) between 76° N and 79° N (i.e., north to the southernmost part of the Nares Strait-Kane Basin region). Hence, they in effect covered a major part of the NOW with loose drift ice and open water which were not covered by us for safety reasons and because it was judged by us to be suboptimal or unsuitable polar bear habitat. Despite that their survey was a multi-species survey mainly targeting beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*), narwhal

(*Monodon monoceros*), walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*), and seals, they detected polar bears both in water and on ice. Heide-Jørgensen et al. (2013) derived an estimate of 60 polar bears (CV 0.96, range: 12-293 bears). Although their point estimate had a large uncertainty due to low sample size, it indicates that a substantial number of polar bears may occur “offshore” on loose drift ice in NOW (i.e., in habitat not covered during our 2014 survey). Given the inherent uncertainty in estimates of density for the unsampled regions, we hypothesize that negative bias arising from incomplete sampling of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation may have been roughly 10 – 30%.

Second, a fundamental assumption of distance sampling is perfect detection of target objects on the transect line (i.e., at distance 0; Buckland et al. 2001). Preliminary analyses with a left-truncated data set suggested that the probability of bears near the aircraft being sighted by at least one observer was >96%, so we considered this assumption to be approximately valid. Our data were too sparse to permit mark-recapture distance sampling analyses (Laake and Borchers 2004) to correct for less than perfect detection at distance 0, but our initial double-observer analyses suggest that any resultant negative bias was modest (<5%).

Population-wide aerial surveys of polar bears have been completed in the autumn over land in Foxe Basin, Western Hudson Bay, and Southern Hudson Bay (Stapleton et al. 2014, 2016, Obbard et al. 2015) and over both land and sea ice in the Barents Sea (Aars et al. 2009). Similarly, recent pilot aerial survey studies over springtime sea ice have been completed in the Baffin Bay and Southern Beaufort Sea subpopulations (Stapleton 2013). However, the aerial survey in the KB subpopulation represents the first attempt to complete a subpopulation-wide survey on springtime sea ice. Although most aerial surveys of polar bears have been conducted during the fall ice-free period, this study illustrates that, in small areas and under favorable

weather conditions, aerial surveys can provide a useful inventory technique on springtime sea ice as well. Aerial surveys may be a particularly valuable tool for monitoring small, remote subpopulations that are not subject to significant harvest pressure and where acquiring detailed demographic information through mark-recapture may be too costly to justify.

We note, however, that larger geographic areas and periods of inclement weather may require more time to complete a comprehensive aerial survey, thereby necessitating more complex study designs to accommodate potential changes in bear densities and the study area itself, especially if sea-ice dynamics are changing during the survey window. Aerial surveys of larger areas like Baffin Bay will require the use of more than one fixed-winged aircraft with long endurance to ensure that the entire area (including remote offshore habitat) is covered within a relatively narrow time frame (e.g., SWG 2011, Nielson et al. 2013). Nevertheless, based on the pilot aerial survey along SE Baffin Island in spring 2010, a group of survey experts concluded that it would be feasible to assess polar bear populations with a larger range (i.e., Baffin Bay) using aerial surveys (Chapter 1).

We recognize that large offshore areas with loose drift ice in the Kane Basin subpopulation's range could not be surveyed by us for safety reasons and because our helicopter had a relatively low range and endurance. Hence, future aerial surveys should consider using fixed-winged aircraft perhaps in combination with a helicopter (SWG 2011).

Our aerial survey estimate of abundance was based on a very small number of encounters ( $n = 28$ ), resulting in some uncertainty in estimation of the detection function. Increasing the number of observations via greater sampling effort will likely improve precision; a minimum of 60 – 80 observations are recommended with distance sampling (Buckland et al. 2001), but even a marginal increase in sightings would improve estimation of the detection function. In addition, if



other sites adopt on-ice surveys using similar study designs and survey platforms, joint analysis in which observations are pooled might yield more reliable estimates of the detection function, thereby improving precision of abundance estimates.

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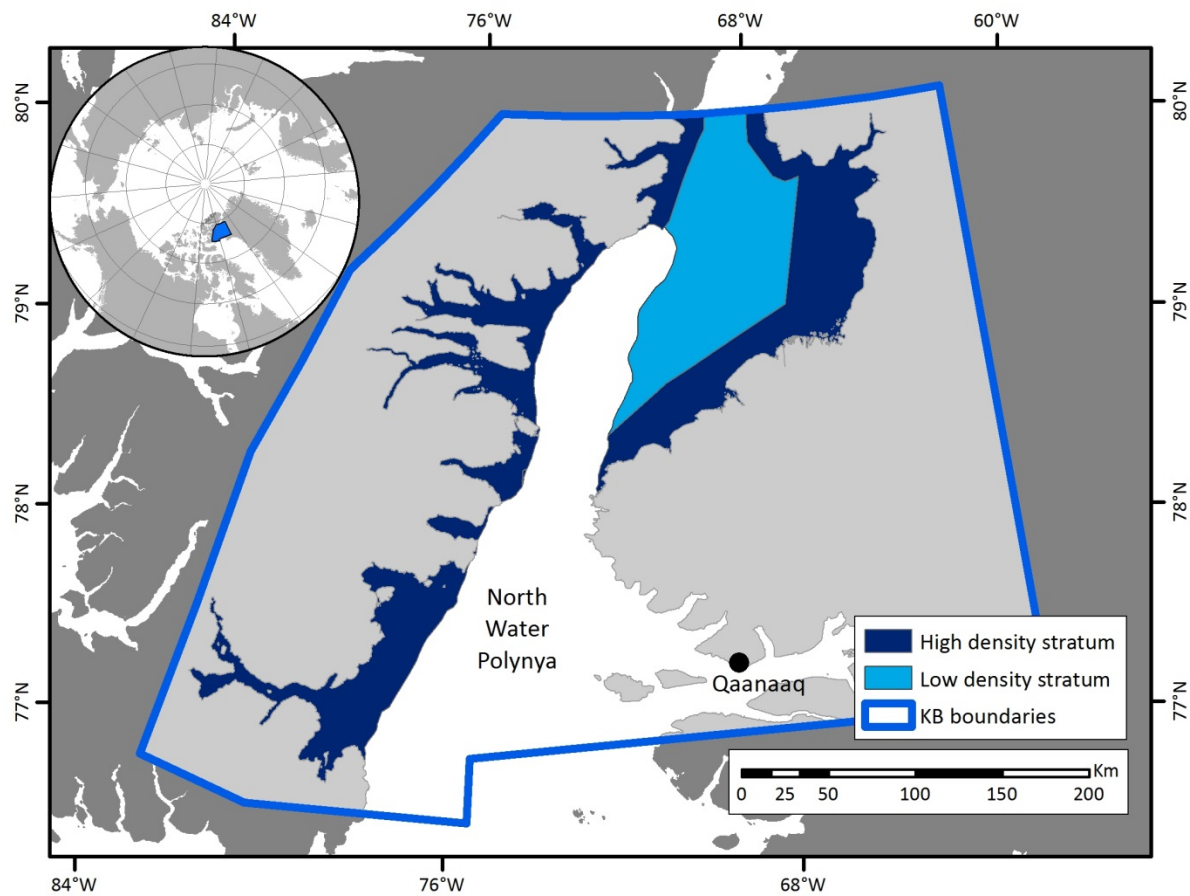
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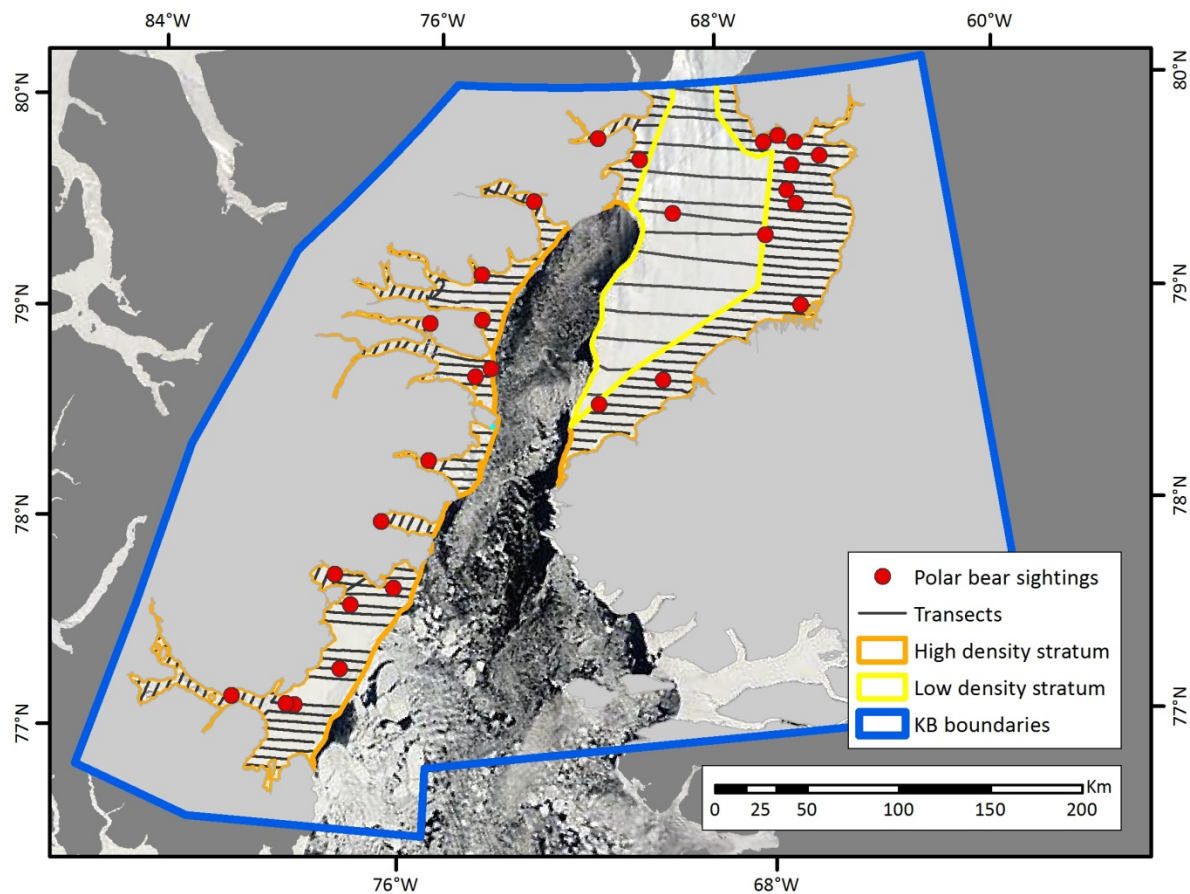
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**Table 11.1.** Results from distance sampling analyses of an aerial survey of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation, April – May, 2014. The most highly supported models ( $\Delta AIC_c < 2$ ) are shown. In the column Model, the key function is followed by the covariate (Light = light conditions).  $p$  = detection probability. High- and low- density refer to stratum-specific estimates.

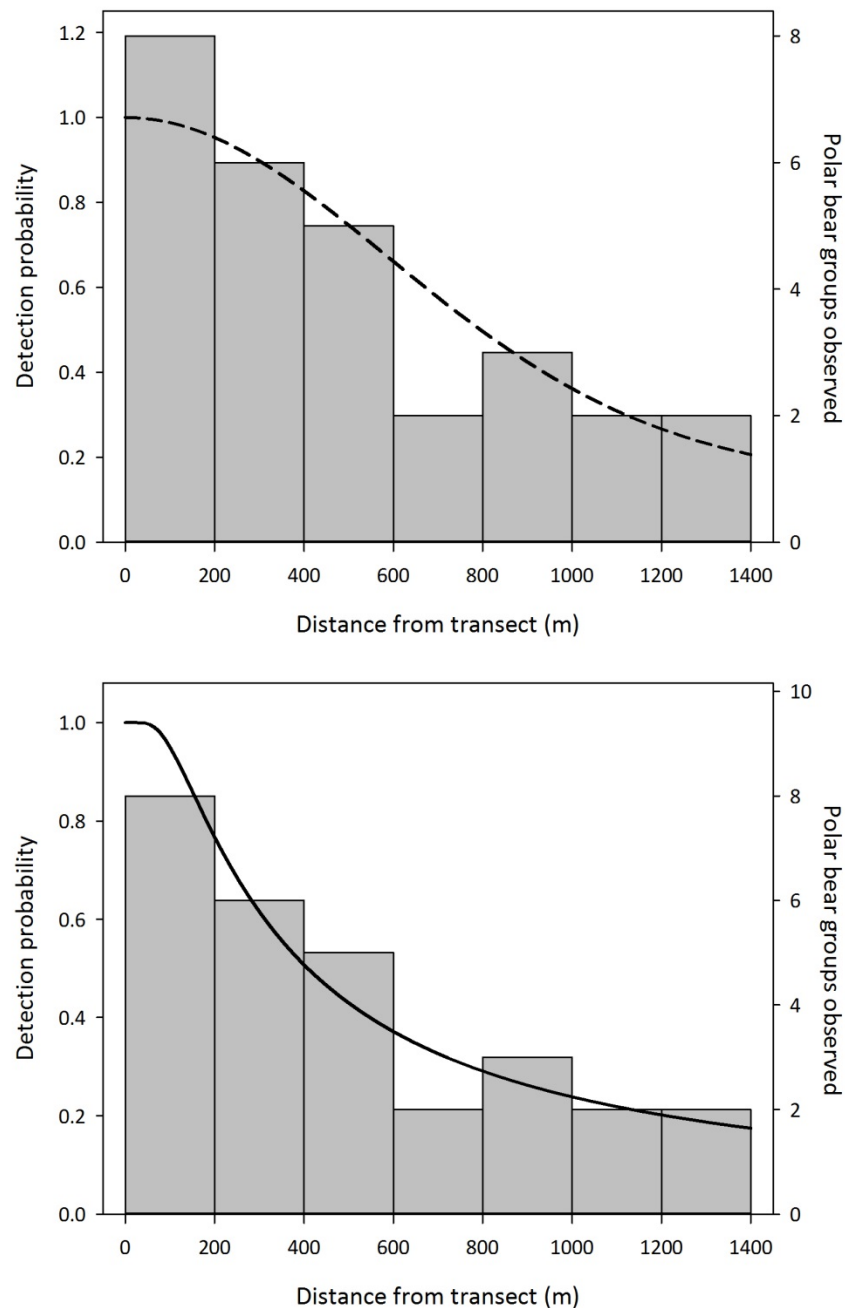
Model	$\Delta AIC_c$	$p$	Density (Bears / 1,000 km <sup>2</sup> )			Abundance (SE)
			High-density	Low-density	Global	
Half-Normal / Light	0.00	0.60 (0.09)	7.5 (2.0)	3.1 (3.1)	6.1 (1.7)	170 (49)
Hazard / None	0.13	0.43 (0.20)	11.1 (6.0)	3.7 (4.0)	8.7 (4.5)	243 (125)
Half-Normal / None	0.37	0.62 (0.09)	7.6 (1.9)	2.5 (2.5)	5.9 (1.6)	166 (44)



**Figure 11.1.** Sampling strata for genetic mark-recapture and aerial survey of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation, April – May, 2014.

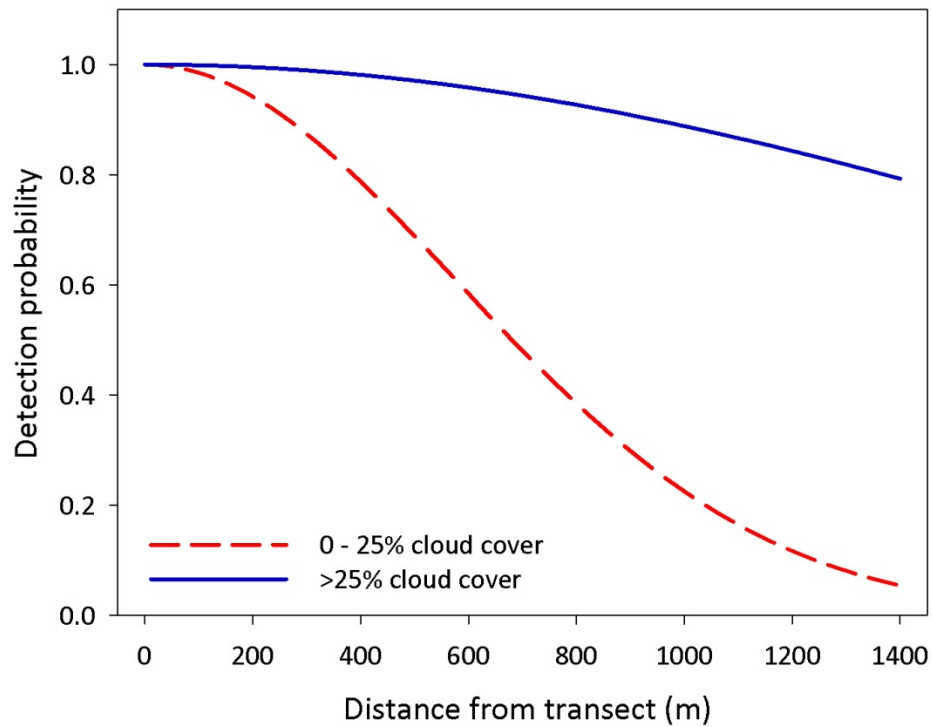


**Figure 11.2.** Transects surveyed and polar bear groups sighted during transect surveys of the Kane Basin subpopulation during April – May, 2014. Transects and sightings are overlaid on MODIS image (1 km resolution; available: <http://modis.gsfc.nasa.gov/>) collected on 5 May 2014. Sea ice in southeastern Kane Basin (i.e., to left of figure legend) was not sampled due to safety and logistical constraints presented by the North Water polynya and because we anticipated very low densities.



**Figure 11.3.** Histograms summarizing sighting distances and estimated detection functions from an aerial survey of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation, April – May, 2014. Top: Half-normal key function including a binary light conditions covariate. Bottom: Hazard rate key function with no adjustment terms or covariates.





**Figure 11.4.** Distance sampling detection function (half-normal key function with binary light conditions covariate) estimated from data collected during an aerial survey of the Kane Basin polar bear subpopulation, April – May, 2014.

## CHAPTER 12

### REPRODUCTIVE METRICS FOR MARK-RECAPTURE SAMPLED POLAR BEARS IN KANE BASIN

#### KEY FINDINGS

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- Data for the study were collected during two periods of MR sampling in KB. Sampling occurred on the sea ice in April and May. During the 1990s, bears were sampled by physical capture and examination using methods previously described. During the 2000s, sampling occurred via physical capture or biopsy darting and subsequent genetic analysis to determine genetic sex and identify individuals.
  - Reproductive metrics for KB, including mean litters sizes for cubs-of-the-year (COY) and yearlings, and an index of recruitment (calculated as the number of yearlings per adult female in the MR sample), were comparable between the 1990s and 2010s sampling periods. Mean litter sizes in KB (for COY: 1.67 in the 1990s and 1.60 in the 2010s) were similar to those observed in other polar bear subpopulations in the archipelago ecoregion (range 1.65 - 1.71). We found no evidence of lower reproductive performance in KB, but sparse data limited our conclusions.
  - During the years with the largest sample sizes (1995, 2013, and 2014), the total sample exceeded 50 bears. In these years, there was notable variation in the proportions of COY (15% - 30%). In contrast, proportions of yearlings and the recruitment index were relatively invariant among years.
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#### 12.1. Introduction

For populations of large, long-lived mammals, changes in reproductive performance can be one of the early indicators of density-dependent regulation and / or changes in environmental carrying capacity (Fowler 1981, 1987). In populations approaching carrying capacity, declines in reproductive performance are likely to occur before declines in adult survival. From both wildlife management and species conservation perspectives, monitoring indices or metrics of reproduction therefore may provide a useful tool for the early detection of potential population trends that may warrant more in-depth study. This is especially true for populations in which

cost or logistical constraints limits the capacity to undertake on-going, intensive demographic studies. In these cases, monitoring reproductive metrics may provide a form of surveillance that can be used to trigger periods of more intensive study.

Reproductive metrics have been identified as an important component for monitoring polar bears across their circumpolar range (Vongraven et al. 2012). These metrics may be used to track long-term trends in the status of subpopulations, parameterize population viability models and support harvest risk assessments (Regehr et al. 2015). Of particular concern, changes in reproduction are predicted to be amongst the first subpopulation-level effects of climate change evident in this species (Derocher et al. 2004, Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Molnár et al. 2011, Stirling and Derocher 2012). Indeed, declines in reproduction have been documented in several polar bear subpopulations in association with long-term changes in sea-ice conditions that appear to be climate induced (Regehr et al. 2007, Rode et al. 2010, Rode et al. 2014).

Changes in reproductive metrics can signal significant changes in subpopulation status of polar bears. However, observations of poor reproductive performance alone do not necessarily imply a decline in subpopulation status. Studies of several polar bear subpopulations have documented declines in reproduction in association with increases in abundance that may be the result of density dependence (Derocher 2005, Peacock et al. 2013). In other cases, variation in reproductive performance within or amongst subpopulations has been attributed to geographic or annual variation in biological productivity and prey availability (i.e., fluctuating carrying capacity; Stirling and Øritsland 1995, Stirling and Lunn 1997, Stirling 2002, Rode et al. 2014). Information on reproduction therefore must be considered alongside other measures of subpopulation performance in-order to properly assess status.

The Kane Basin (KB) polar bear subpopulation is part of the archipelago ecoregion as defined by Amstrup et al. (2008), where sea ice does not melt entirely in the summer and some bears remain on the ice year-round. However, the sea ice situation in Kane Basin has changed markedly in recent decades (Chapter 9). Although currently designated as declining based on population viability modelling (PBSG 2010), a comparison of results from two mark recapture studies suggests the abundance of this small, low density subpopulation has not changed significantly over the two decades (Taylor et al. 2008a, Chapter 10). KB has experienced long term changes in sea-ice composition, and a trend towards earlier spring break-up and later fall freeze-up (Laidre et al. 2015, Chapters 4 and 9). However, model projections predict that KB will be one of the last polar bear subpopulations to experience the negative consequences of climate change including reproductive failure (Amstrup et al. 2008, Hamilton et al. 2014). Here, we summarize reproductive metrics for KB using data collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling from 1992 to 1997 (Taylor et al. 2008a) and 2012 to 2014 (Chapter 10). Our results provide additional context for interpreting the results of mark-recapture analyses and assessment of this subpopulation's present status.

## **12.2. Materials and Methods**

### Study Area

The KB polar bear subpopulation covers roughly 150,000 km<sup>2</sup> and spans portions of Nunavut, Canada, including Ellesmere Island, as well as northwestern Greenland (Taylor et al. 2008a). However, the boundaries of the KB subpopulation encompasses a substantial amount of land and glaciers so that the essential sea-ice polar bear habitat only amounts to less than one half of the area enclosed by the borders of the management unit; *cf.* Figure 11.2). The

subpopulation ranges over Kane Basin, Nares Strait, Smith Sound and adjacent fjords on eastern Ellesmere Island and Northwest Greenland (the Qaanaaq areas). It is bounded to the north by the Arctic Basin subpopulation (via the Kennedy Channel), to the south by the BB and LS subpopulations, and to the west by Norwegian Bay (NW). Kane Basin forms part of the Arctic archipelago ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008); sea ice remains present in the northern range (i.e., Nares Strait-Kane Basin) throughout the year, largely due to the movement of polar pack ice from Arctic Basin, and reaches a minimum in late summer. However, the amount of sea ice during summer in Nares Strait-Kane Basin has dropped markedly in recent decades (e.g., Figure 9.2).

### Field Sampling

Data for the study were collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling in KB. Sampling occurred on the sea ice in April and May. During the 1990s, bears were sampled by physical capture and examination using methods previously described (Taylor et al. 2008a). Data on the sex, age-class and reproductive status of each individual were recorded. Age of individuals was determined based on previous capture history, known (in the case of cubs and yearlings) or estimated from counts of annular rings in an extracted vestigial premolar tooth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998). Individuals were identified by means of uniquely numbered ear tags and lip tattoos. Group size, family status, location and date were also recorded.

During the 2000s, sampling occurred via physical capture or biopsy darting and subsequent genetic analysis to determine genetic sex and identify individuals. Sampling occurred during 25 April-6 May in 2012 and during 27 April and 10 May in 2013. With biopsy darting, we remotely estimated sex and age class (cub-of-the-year, yearling, subadult [ages 2 –

4], and adult) from the air at a range of 3-7 m above ground. Sex was later confirmed via genetic analysis. In estimating age-class and sex, the observer used multiple cues, including the size of an individual relative to its surrounding environment or accompanying bears, membership in a family group (mothers and cubs or yearlings), secondary sexual characteristics (adult males; e.g., fore-leg guard hairs), body shape and proportions, the presence of scars (which are most often seen on adult males) and observations of urination (i.e., urine dribbling from under tail in females). Field notes also assisted in *post-hoc* reassessment of age-sex class once genetic sex was known. Age-class was later verified in some bears from previous or future captures in which an individual was captured and physically examined or where an individual was matched via DNA to membership in a known family at some past or future point. We assessed the accuracy of this system for estimating the age-class and sex of polar bears using a sample of known age-class individuals (Appendix B).

### Reproductive Metrics

We calculated annual reproductive metrics that have been previously recommended (Vongraven et al. 2012) or used in studies of polar bears (e.g., Derocher and Stirling 1995, Rode et al. 2010, Peacock et al. 2013, Stapleton et al. 2014, Regehr et al. 2015). For cubs-of-the-year (COY) and yearlings, mean litter sizes were calculated from observed litter sizes. Because we did not have estimated ages for adult females sampled in 2012-2014 and because sample sizes were small in most years, we calculated a pooled mean for each year rather than age-specific values. Numbers of COY and yearling were expressed as a proportion of the total bears sampled each year. An index of recruitment was calculated as the total number yearlings divided by the total number of adult females in the sample (Derocher and Stirling 1995, Regehr et al. 2015).

Some individuals were sampled more than once in a given year. These recaptures were excluded from analyses. Captures of the same individual over multiple years were included.

We examined annual variation in reproductive metrics and compared metrics between the two epochs (1992-1997 and 2012-2014). Statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS package (Version 24.0, IBM Corp. 2016).

### 12.3. Results

During 1992-1997 and 2012-2014, we sampled 53 family groups consisting of an adult female and 1-2 dependent COY (87 COY in total). We also sampled 24 family groups consisting of an adult female and 1-3 dependent yearlings (32 yearlings in total). The mean number of family groups sampled annually was 5.9 (range: 2-15) and 2.7 (range: 0-5) for COY and yearling families respectively. Annual reproductive metrics are presented in Table 12.1.

Annual variation in observed litters sizes was not significant amongst COY (Kruskal-Wallis,  $H = 4.86$ ,  $P = 0.772$ ) or yearlings (Kruskal-Wallis,  $H = 9.49$ ,  $P = 0.219$ ). COY comprised between 9 and 38% of the bears sampled annually. Yearlings comprised between 0 and 16% of annual observations. Recruitment ranged from zero to 0.43. Sample sizes were too small to permit further analyses of annual reproductive metrics. Pooling data within epochs there were no differences in mean litter sizes between the 1990s and 2000s (Mann-Whitney U test,  $U = 369$ ,  $P = 0.700$  for COY;  $U = 79.5$ ,  $P = 0.671$  for yearlings). Proportions of COY and yearlings were also similar between epochs (Table 12.2).

During sampling in 2012-2014, 9 (12%) of 78 adult females encountered were of known age (marked during the 1990s) and ranged in age from 18 to 35 years. Five were between 18 and 20 years old, three of which were observed with litters. None of the 4 (5%) bears > 20 years old

were observed with offspring. In comparison, during sampling in the 1990s, 77 adult females were sampled. Of these, 10 (13%) were 18 years old or greater (based on tooth aging) ranging in age from 18 to 21 years, and seven were accompanied by offspring. Two (2.6%) were greater than 20 years of age.

#### **12.4. Discussion**

Sample sizes were too small in most years to permit investigation of annual variation in reproductive metrics in KB. Observed variation likely was primarily the product of sample size rather than biological effect. During the years with the largest sample sizes (1995, 2013, and 2014), the total sample exceeded 50 bears, representing a sizeable portion of this small subpopulation. In these years, there was notable variation in the proportions of COY (15% - 30%; Table 12.1). In contrast, proportions of yearlings and the recruitment index were relatively invariant among years. We are unaware of any source of sampling bias that would account for this apparent variation in COY production and suggest that it may reflect pulsing or synchrony in reproduction. Anecdotally, dates of spring and fall sea-ice transition in the years prior to these 3 years were unremarkable in terms of variation; offering no explanation in terms of environmental conditions.

Our surveys were conducted in late April-early May. Den emergence date even at high latitudes (i.e.,  $> 76^{\circ}$  N) late March (Ferguson et al. 2000; Chapter 9, Figure 9.14). Hence, we are confident that our observations of adult females with COYs were representative.

During recent sampling, 2012-2014, we recaptured a small number of older, known age adult females that were originally marked in the 1990s. Amongst this sample, none of the individuals  $>20$  years of age were accompanied by offspring. Although the sample size is small,



this is consistent with the reproductive senescence reported in some other subpopulations Ramsay and Stirling 1988, Derocher and Stirling 1994).

Reproductive metrics for KB in both time periods were comparable, and mean litter sizes in KB were within the range of observed variation for other polar bear subpopulations in the archipelago ecoregion (Table 12.2). In summary, we found no evidence of lower reproductive performance in KB, but sparse data limited our conclusions.

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**Table 12.1.** Reproductive metrics derived from annual mark-recapture sampling data from Kane Basin. Captures and between season recaptures are included.

Year	Mean Litter Size (n, SD)		Proportion of Total Observations (n)		Recruitment Index <sup>1</sup> (Yearlings/adult female)
	COY	Yearling	COY	Yearlings	
<b>1992</b>	2.00 (3, 0.00)	0.00 (0, 0.00)	0.38 (16)	0.00 (16)	0.00
<b>1993</b>	2.00 (2, 0.00)	1.00 (3, 0.00)	0.17 (23)	0.13 (23)	0.43
<b>1994</b>	1.60 (5, 0.55)	2.00 (2, 0.00)	0.26 (31)	0.13 (31)	0.40
<b>1995</b>	1.70 (10, 0.48)	1.50 (2, 0.71)	0.25 (67)	0.04 (67)	0.14
<b>1996</b>	1.40 (5, 0.55)	1.00 (3, 0.00)	0.19 (36)	0.08 (36)	0.23
<b>1997</b>	1.50 (2, 0.71)	2.00 (2, 1.41)	0.09 (32)	0.13 (32)	0.40
<b>2012</b>	1.50 (4, 0.58)	1.40 (5, 0.55)	0.14 (44)	0.16 (44)	0.37
<b>2013</b>	1.57 (7, 0.53)	1.33 (3, 0.58)	0.15 (71)	0.06 (71)	0.14
<b>2014</b>	1.65 (14, 0.50)	1.00 (4, 0.00)	0.30 (84)	0.05 (84)	0.13

<sup>1</sup> – *Sensu* Regehr et al. (2015)

**Table 12.2.** Comparison of reproductive metrics for some polar bear subpopulations in the Arctic archipelago ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008). Sampling occurred during ice-free periods.

Subpopulation	Mean Litter Size		Proportion of Total Observations		Source
	COY	Yearling	COY	Yearlings	
Kane Basin (1992-97)	1.67	1.42	0.22	0.08	Taylor et al. (2008a)
Kane Basin (2012-14)	1.60	1.25	0.21	0.08	This study
GB	1.65	-	-	-	Taylor et al. (2009)
LS	1.69	-	-	-	Taylor et al. (2008b)
MC	1.68	-	-	-	Taylor et al. (2006)
NW	1.71	-	-	-	Taylor et al. (2008b)

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **OBSERVATIONS ON THE BODY CONDITION AND FORAGING HABITS OF POLAR BEARS IN KANE BASIN DURING THE SPRING**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

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- Body condition was better amongst KB subadults and adult females with yearlings during the 2010s relative to the 1990s, though sample sizes were limited. In contrast, condition amongst adult males, adult females with COYs, and lone adult females was similar between these time periods.
  - Improved condition in the 2010s may reflect natural variation or a response to long-term changes in the sea-ice regimen in Kane Basin, largely turning into a system resembling a seasonal sea-ice ecoregion.
  - Seals and polar bears were similarly distributed in Kane Basin.
  - Relatively high densities of both seals and bears in northeastern Kane Basin, near the Humbolt Glacier, indicates that this region has high productivity and is important habitat for polar bears in the subpopulation.
  - A high proportion of KB bears were found to have extensive hair loss and skin ulcerations on their feet. The cause of these lesions is unknown to science. Traditional knowledge suggests this phenomenon is the result of abrasive injuries sustained by walking and digging in hard, icy, coarse snow cover on the spring sea ice combined with increased rates of movement during the peak mating and feeding periods.
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#### **13.1. Introduction**

For populations of large, long-lived mammals changes in body condition will be among the early indicators of density-dependent regulation and / or changes in environmental carrying capacity (Fowler 1987, 1990, Zedrosser et al. 2006). In populations approaching K, declines in condition will occur before declines in adult survival. From both wildlife management and species conservation perspectives, monitoring body condition may therefore provide a useful tool for the early detection of population trends that warrant more in-depth study. This is especially

true for populations where cost or logistical constraints limit the capacity to undertake on-going, intensive demographic studies. In these cases, monitoring condition may provide a form of surveillance that can be used to trigger periods of more intensive study.

The annual life-cycle of polar bears is characterized by large seasonal changes in body condition (Watts & Hansen, 1987, Ramsay et al., 1992, Ramsay and Stirling 1988, Atkinson and Ramsay 1995). Throughout most of their circumpolar range, bears are thought to gain condition during the spring and early summer when juvenile seals are abundant and relatively susceptible to predation (Stirling and Archibald 1977, Smith 1980, Hammill and Smith 1991, Stirling and Øritsland 1995, Pilfold et al. 2012). This period of hyperphagia is followed by a scarcity of food in the late summer and fall when sea ice reaches a minimum throughout the Arctic. During this season, bears in some regions are forced onto land by the melting sea ice where access to seals and other marine mammal prey is greatly reduced (Stirling et al. 1977, Derocher and Stirling 1990, Ramsay et al. 1991). In other regions, bears remain on off-shore pack-ice but likely also have reduced access to and/or less success in catching seals (Amstrup et al. 2000, Stirling 2002, Atwood et al. 2015a, Rode et al. 2015).

Given this dynamic cycle of feeding and fasting, body condition attained during the spring and early summer is expected to exert a significant influence on the survival, reproductive performance and thus status of polar bear subpopulations (Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, Derocher and Stirling 1995, 1996, Molnár et al. 2010, Molnár et al. 2011). Tracking long-term trends in body condition has thus been identified as an important component of the monitoring scheme for polar bears across their circumpolar range (Vongraven et al. 2012, Patyk et al. 2015). In the absence of more intensive studies, simple body condition metrics may be useful indices for monitoring subpopulations and detecting responses to changing environmental conditions



(Amstrup et al. 2006, Stirling et al. 2008a, Vongraven et al. 2012). Of particular concern, changes in body condition are predicted to be amongst the first subpopulation-level impacts of climate change evident in this species (Derocher et al. 2004, Stirling and Parkinson 2006, Wiig et al 2008, Stirling and Derocher 2012). Indeed, declines in condition have been documented in several polar bear subpopulations in association with long-term changes in sea-ice conditions that appear to be climate induced (e.g., Stirling et al. 1999, Rode et al. 2010, Rode et al. 2014, Obbard et al. 2016).

A variety of quantitative and qualitative body condition indices have been used on polar bears including body weight estimated from girth (e.g., Derocher and Stirling 1995, Rode et al. 2011), body mass indices standardized for length (e.g., Stirling et al 1999, Cattet et al. 2002, Obbard et al. 2016), skull width (Rode et al. 2010, 2011), percent body fat determined by isotopic dilution or bioelectrical impedance analysis (Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, 1996, McKinney et al. 2014), percent lipid content of adipose tissue biopsies (Stirling et al. 2008b, McKinney et al. 2014) and a visually assigned fatness index (Amstrup et al. 2006, Stirling et al. 2008a, b). Most of these condition indices require the handling of bears to collect measurements. However, the fatness index (FI) and potentially the lipid content of adipose tissue (Pagano et al. 2014, McKinney et al. 2014) may be obtained without handling thus making them suitable for use in subpopulations monitored by less invasive methods such as aerial survey or genetic mark-recapture.

The Kane Basin (KB) polar bear subpopulation is part of the archipelago ecoregion as defined by Amstrup et al. (2008), where sea ice does not melt entirely in the summer and some bears remain on the ice year-round. Although currently designated as declining based on population viability modelling (PBSG 2010), a comparison of results from two mark recapture

studies suggests the abundance of this small, low density subpopulation has not changed significantly over the two decades (Taylor et al. 2008a, Chapter 10). KB has experienced long term changes in sea-ice composition, and a trend towards earlier spring break-up and later fall freeze-up (Laidre et al. 2015, Chapter 4). However, model projections predict that KB will be one of the last polar bear subpopulations to experience the negative consequences of climate change including reproductive failure (Amstrup et al. 2008, Hamilton et al. 2014).

Here we summarize information on the body condition of polar bears in KB collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling from 1992 to 1997 and 2012 to 2014. Using the Fatness Index (FI: Stirling et al. 2008b) as a qualitative metric we examine differences in condition between the two time periods. Our results provide supplementary information for interpreting the results of the genetic mark-recapture (Chapter 10) and other recent studies in KB (Chapters 2 and 9), and for understanding the present status of this subpopulation. We also report on incidental observations of prominent skin lesions that were found on some KB bears during the latter period of the study. Finally, we report incidental observations of spring time foraging by bears and the distribution of seals in KB.

## **13.2. Materials and Methods**

### Study Area

The KB polar bear subpopulation covers roughly 150,000 km<sup>2</sup> and spans portions of Nunavut, Canada, including Ellesmere Island, as well as northwestern Greenland (Taylor et al. 2008). However, the boundaries of the KB subpopulation encompasses a substantial amount of land and glaciers so that the essential sea-ice polar bear habitat only amounts to less than one half of the area enclosed by the borders of the management unit (*cf.* Figure 13.1). The

subpopulation ranges over Kane Basin, Nares Strait, Smith Sound and adjacent fjords on eastern Ellesmere Island and Northwest Greenland (the Qaanaaq area). It is bounded to the north by the Arctic Basin subpopulation (via the Kennedy Channel), to the south by the BB and LS subpopulations, and to the west by Norwegian Bay (NW). Kane Basin forms part of the Arctic archipelago ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008); sea ice remains present in the northern range (i.e., Nares Strait-Kane Basin) throughout the year, largely due to the movement of polar pack ice from Arctic Basin, and reaches a minimum in late summer. However, sea-ice conditions have changed markedly in the Kane Basin region in recent decades (Born et al. 2011; Figure 9.2).

### Field Sampling

Data for the study were collected during two periods of mark-recapture sampling in KB. In both periods sampling occurred on the sea ice in April and May using a helicopter flying at 300-500 feet above sea-level to search for bears across the study area. During the 1990s (1992-97), bears were sampled by physical capture and examination using methods previously described (Taylor et al. 2008a). Data on the sex, age-class and reproductive status of each individual were recorded. Age of individuals was determined based on previous capture history, known (in the case of cubs and yearlings) or estimated from counts of annular rings in an extracted vestigial premolar tooth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998). Individuals were identified by means of uniquely numbered ear tags and lip tattoos. Group size, family status, location and date were also recorded.

During the 2010s (2012-14), sampling occurred via physical capture or biopsy darting and subsequent genetic analysis to determine genetic sex and identify individuals. With biopsy darting, we remotely estimated sex and age class (cub-of-the-year, yearling, subadult [ages 2 –

4], and adult) from the air at a range of 3-7 m above ground. Sex was later confirmed via genetic analysis. In estimating age-class and sex, the observer used multiple cues, including the size of an individual relative to its surrounding environment or accompanying bears, membership in a family group (mothers and cubs or yearlings), secondary sexual characteristics (adult males; e.g., fore-leg guard hairs), body shape and proportions, the presence of scars (which are most often seen on adult males) and observations of urination (i.e., urine dribbling from under tail in females). Field notes also assisted in *post-hoc* reassessment of age-sex class once genetic sex was known. Age-class was later verified in some bears from previous or future captures in which an individual was captured and physically examined or where an individual was matched via DNA to membership in a known family at some past or future point. We assessed the accuracy of this system for estimating the age-class and sex of polar bears using a sample of known age-class individuals (Appendix B).

### Body Condition Scoring

Because most of the bears sampled during the latter period of sampling (2012-2014) were biopsy darted rather than captured and handled, our ability to compare body condition between time periods was limited to visually assigned Fatness Index (FI) scores only. The FI has been validated as a measure of condition in polar bears, being closely correlated with more quantitative condition indices (Stirling et al. 2008b, McKinney et al. 2014) and other biological factors (e.g., Henricksen et al. 2001, Amstrup et al. 2006). During both sampling periods, all encountered bears were assigned a FI score on a scale of 1-5 where 1 and 5 represent the leanest and most obese bears, respectively (Stirling et al. 2008b). During the 1990s, this score was based on physical examination of captured bears. For bears in the 2010s, FI scores for most

(67%) individuals were assigned based on examination from the air at a distance of 3-7 m above ground. The remaining portion was assigned FI scores based on physical examination after capture.

All bears were initially scored in the field according to the standard FI on a scale of 1 to 5 (Stirling et al. 2008b). This scoring system was subsequently simplified to a binary Body Condition Score (BCS) where individuals in poor (FI = 1, 2) and fair-good (FI = 3, 4 or 5) condition were assigned scores of 1 and 2 respectively. Similar modifications of the FI for polar bears have been employed in other studies to facilitate analyses (Stirling et al. 2008a) or have been recommended for use in general monitoring schemes for polar bears (Vongraven et al. 2012). In our case, this refinement was necessary due to the small samples sizes overall in our study and the low frequencies of bears at the extremes of the 5 point FI scale (i.e., very few or no bears with FI scores of 1 or 5). This simplified scoring system was also a potential means to reduce bias in assigning condition scores. The assumption made was that a simplified scale would be subject to less bias resulting from different observers and / or distance from bear at time of scoring. Experienced observers should be able to discriminate a bear in poor condition even at distances of up to 7 m. All observers in our study had extensive experience studying polar bears including capture, handling and body condition scoring.

For analyses, we pooled BCS data collected in different years into two periods (epochs); the 1990s (1992-97) and the 2010 (2012-2014). Again this was necessary due to low samples sizes. Repeated observations of the same individual (as identified by physical mark or genotype) within a given year were excluded from the analyses. Observations of the same individual in different years were included. Similar to Stirling et al. (2008a), we assumed that observations of the same individual in different years were statistically independent given the dynamic nature of

body condition in polar bears (Watts and Hansen 1987, Atkinson and Ramsay 1995, 1996) and its response to annual variation in environmental conditions.

For different sex, age and reproductive classes of polar bears we compared BCS between the two epochs using contingency tables analyses (Cross Tabs procedure in SPSS Version 24.0, IBM Corp. 2016). We also considered the potential effect of the timing of sampling on the BCS of bears. Along with the binary categorical variable (Epoch: 1990s and 2010s), Julian Day of sampling was used as an independent variable in a logistic regression (Binary Logistic procedure in SPSS Version 24.0, IBM Corp. 2016) to examine variation in BCS. Both variables were entered into the regression model. We did not specify an interaction between Julian Day and Epoch. All tests were two-tailed with alpha at 0.05.

#### Other Observations

During sampling from 2012-2014, we also made several other types of observations either systematically or opportunistically. For each bear encountered we noted any evidence of recent feeding. The presence of a seal kill or bears with full pendulous stomachs constituted evidence of feeding. While searching for bears in 2013, we noted the locations of live seals using a GPS. Each group comprising 1 or more individuals was recorded as a single observation. Finally, during capture and physical examination of bears in 2011 and 2012 we noted the presence or absence of some prominent skin lesions that had not previously been described in the literature.

### **13.3. Results**

#### Body Condition Scores

Body Condition Scores (BCS) were assigned to 129 and 135 subadult and adult polar bears encountered during sampling in KB in the 1990s and 2010s, respectively. BCS for adult males were similar between the two epochs (Table 13.1). In contrast, across all reproductive classes, adult females in the 2010s tended to be in better condition than those in the 1990s; although this was statistically significant for adult females with yearlings only. Similarly, subadults in the 2010s were in better condition at time of encounter.

Although sampling occurred in April and early May during both epochs, timing of sampling differed (Mann-Whitney  $U = 1,557.00$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ). Median Julian day of sampling was slightly earlier during the 1990s (121.45) relative to the 2010s (124.68) across all sex-age classes. Within sex-age classes, these slight differences in timing of sampling were maintained (e.g., adult females with yearlings, Mann-Whitney  $U = 104.50$ ,  $P = 0.060$ ; sub adults, Mann-Whitney  $U = 275.0$ ,  $P = 0.02$ ). Incorporating Julian day of sampling into a logistic regression did not explain variation in body condition amongst most classes of bears with the exception of adult females with cubs-of-the-year (COY) where bears sampled later tended to be in better condition (Appendix E). Amongst adult females with yearlings, Julian day was not a predictor of BCS and condition was better in the 2010s than in the 1990s. For subadults there was no effect of either timing of sampling or epoch on the probability of a bear being in poor versus fair-good condition.

### Other Observations

*Feeding* – During sampling in 2012-2014, 14% of bears encountered showed evidence of recent feeding (excluding dependent offspring). Prevalence of feeding observations was highest amongst adult females with offspring and lowest in adult males and subadults (Table 13.2).

*Seals* – In 2013, 94 groups consisting of one or live ringed seals, *Phoca hispida*, were observed while searching for bears in KB. Notable concentrations of seals were encountered in north east Kane Basin in front of the Humbolt glacier and inside fiords along eastern Ellesmere Island (Figure 13.1).

*Skin Lesions* –In 2012 and 2013, 40% of the bears that were captured and physically examined were found to have unusual skin lesions. These were characterized as locally extensive alopecia (hair loss) over the feet, in most cases (75%) affecting all four feet (Figure 13.2). In addition, some of the affected individuals had multi-focal ulcerations on the plantar/palmar heel and digital foot pads and on the dorsal aspects of all 4 feet (Figure 13.3). Discharge from these lesions was purulent and sanguinous. Granulation tissue forming in some of these ulcers indicated they were chronic in nature. Even under anesthesia, some bears exhibited notable discomfort when these ulcers were gently palpated during examination, often reacting by moving the foot or lifting their head. Finally, two individuals (an adult male and a yearling) were found to have mild generalized alopecia over the dorsal neck, thorax and abdomen.

The prevalence of foot lesions was highest amongst adult males (75%) and lowest amongst cubs-of-the-years (0%) (Table 13.3). The prevalence of bleeding ulcerations on the feet, an indication of the severity and/or chronicity of the condition, was highest amongst adult males with 75% exhibiting some degree of ulceration. Also of note were two bears captured in 2012 without lesions that were recaptured in 2013 with lesions.

## **13.4. Discussion**

### Body Condition



With the limited data in this study we found evidence of differences in the spring time body condition of KB polar bears between the 1990s and 2010s. Condition amongst adult females with yearlings and subadults was better in 2010s. In contrast, condition amongst adult males, adult females with COY, and lone adult females was similar between these time periods. These findings may be attributable to several factors including bias in the data, natural variation in condition and long-term trends in environmental conditions.

Several sources of bias were possible in our study associated with use of a qualitative body condition score rather than a quantitative metric. BCS data were collected by several observers. In the 1990s, most data were collected by a single observer. In the 2010s all data were collected by a single but different observer. Differences in the assignment of condition scores by these two observers could therefore generate the apparent differences in condition between time periods. Since individual bears were not scored by more than one observer, teasing out potential observer effects is challenging. While we cannot exclude the possibility of observer bias in our study, several lines of evidence suggest that this potential bias is unlikely to account for our results. First, to reduce observer bias we employed (*post-hoc*) a simplified body condition scoring system that required observers to discriminate between bears in poor versus fair-good condition. All observers in the study were experienced polar bear biologists who had previously handled hundreds or thousands of bears in varying condition and should have been capable of accurately discriminating such bears. Second, as noted by Stirling et al. (2008a) although the FI from which our condition metric was derived is a qualitative index and thus subjective, it has been found to be “*repeatable between individual biologists when blind comparisons are done in the field over both short and long time periods.*” In other studies, FI data collected by multiple observers have been found to correlate closely with quantitative

indices of condition (e.g., Stirling et al. 2008b, McKinney et al. 2014). Finally, we found differences in condition between time periods amongst adult females with yearling and subadult only. If these differences in condition reflect observer bias we would expect this to be evident in all classes of bears.

Body condition scores in the 1990s were collected from bears captured and physically examined. In contrast scores in the 2000s were from bears either captured (33%) or observed from the air without handling (67%). The effect of close-up versus distance examination on the scoring of condition is unknown. McKinney et al. (2014) found that remotely assigned FI ratings did not correlate with the % lipid content of adipose tissue; another measure of condition. However, their sample sizes were small and limited to comparisons of bears of FI 3 and 4 only whereas bears in our study had FI ratings ranging from 1 to 5. Remotely scoring FI may be a less robust (precise) index of condition but is not necessarily inherently biased relative to physical examination. For many of the same reasons discussed previously concerning observer effects, we suggest that this potential source of bias is unlikely to account for our results. The use of a simplified scoring system (poor versus fair-good) in our study should have helped to reduce errors in scoring for bears observed from the air.

Another source of error in our study associated with differences in sampling between the 1990s (physical capture) and 2010s (physical capture or aerial observation) was in the classification of bears by sex and age-class based on aerial observation rather than handling. Classifying bears from the air is without doubt less accurate than physical examination. However, aerial classification is accurate in most instances (Chapter 5, Appendix B), especially amongst adult males and adult females with offspring. Misclassification was therefore unlikely to explain differences in condition of adult females with yearlings. Additionally, despite being

less precise we have no evidence to suggest that aerial classification results in a bias in age and sex classifications amongst a group of bears. This source of measurement error thus seems unlikely to account for our results.

Body condition amongst bears likely improves progressively during the spring and early summer as the availability of seals increases (Stirling and Archibald 1977, Smith 1980, Hammill and Smith 1991, Stirling and Øritsland 1995, Pilfold et al. 2012). Sampling in the 1990s tended to occur earlier in the spring than in the 2010s. This difference in the timing of sampling could therefore partially account for the better condition we observed amongst some classes of bears in the 2010s. However, we note that differences in timing although significant were relatively small (i.e., 3-4 day difference in median day of sampling) so the effect on condition data may be minor. Additionally, timing of sampling was not a significant predictor of body condition amongst adult females with yearling or subadults; the two classes of bear in which differences in condition scores were detected. Finally, if timing of sampling were a significant factor we would have expected similar bias in other classes. Interestingly, we found that condition amongst adult females with COY was a function of Julian day of sampling suggesting consistent with the hypothesis that females emerging from maternal dens begin to steadily recover lost body condition in the spring.

Several ecological explanations could explain our findings. Body condition amongst polar bears fluctuates on temporal and spatial scales in response to annual variation in environmental conditions regardless of any underlying long-term trends (Kingsley 1979, Stirling 2002). Our findings may simply reflect this normal variation in condition whereby sampling in the 2010s occurred at a higher point in condition than in the 1990s. However, this would not account for the fact that improved condition was only detected amongst adult females with

yearlings and subadults; since presumably all classes of bears can capitalize on improved environmental conditions. Failure to find differences in condition amongst other age classes may be due to the limited samples sizes, lack of precision in condition scoring and / or bias in our study. We note that condition tended to be better in 2010s amongst all classes of adult females; although only statistically significant for those with yearlings.

As an alternative explanation, differences in body condition between the 1990s and 2010s may reflect long-term changes in environmental conditions. At the southern extent of the polar bears' range, declining condition has been associated with reduced sea-ice cover resulting from climate change (e.g., Stirling et al. 1999, Rode et al. 2010, Rode et al. 2014, Obbard et al. 2016). However, High Arctic polar bears such as those in KB are predicted to be amongst the last members of the species negatively impacted by climate change (Derocher et al. 2004). An initial impact of climate change in KB has been an observed reduction in the extent of multi-year ice and replacement with thinner annual ice (Hamilton et al. 2014, Chapter 4). Such changes in ice regimen are predicted to have a positive effect on polar bears via increased primary productivity and access to prey (Derocher et al. 2004). Our finding of improved body condition amongst adult females and subadults is consistent with this prediction and may be a sign of improved environmental conditions (albeit temporarily). In some subpopulations where effects of climate change have been reported, body condition has been negatively affected to a greater and / or more easily detectable degree amongst the adult female and subadult classes (Obbard et al. 2006, Rode et al. 2010). This suggests that sensitivity to deteriorating environmental conditions varies by sex, age, and reproductive status; presumably as a result of differing nutritional and energetic requirements and / or rates of food intake. Conversely, it is reasonable to assume that the age classes most readily impacted by negative changes in the environment will be the first to respond

positively as conditions improved. This hypothesis is consistent with our finding that condition improved significantly amongst adult females and subadults but not adult males.

Given the limitations of our data set as discussed above, we are unable to confidently resolve between the differing explanations for our finding of improved body condition between the 1990s and 2010s. We therefore urge caution in interpreting these results. Never-the-less, it is reasonable to conclude that there has been no decline in condition in KB.

### Feeding Observations

During the 2010s, the proportion of individuals showing signs of having recently fed was lowest amongst adult males. This is consistent with the hypothesis that adult males forgo foraging opportunities during the spring mating period while pursuing estrous females (Cherry et al. 2009, Stirling et al. 2015). The relatively low feeding rates we observed amongst subadults is consistent with the hypothesis that juvenile bears are less successful in hunting. We did not have data on feeding rates during the 1990s sampling period for comparison. Consequently, we are unable to assess potential changes in hunting success that could account for the improved condition observed amongst bears in the 2010s.

### Seal Distribution

The distribution of seal observations made during mark-recapture sampling of polar bears was uncorrected for search effort. However, we note that the relative densities of seals along our search tracks was similar to the distribution of the polar bears we encountered (Chapters 10 and 11). Not surprisingly, where we found relatively high numbers of seals, we also found relatively high numbers of bears. The high densities of ringed seals found in north eastern KB at the front

of the Humbolt Glacier is consistent with other studies that have found sea ice in front of tide-water glaciers to be prime breeding habitat for seals (Lydersen et al. 2014). This area of Kane Basin appears to have high productivity and is likely an important feeding area for polar bears. This is consistent with traditional ecological knowledge indicating that the area was a preferred hunting location for Greenlandic Inuit (Born et al. 2011). According to PBSG (1998), Taylor et al. (2001), and Born (pers. obs. 1994 and 1995) both the Greenland and Canadian portions of Kane Basin were mostly mixed annual and multi-year sea ice that appeared to be favourable habitat for polar bears in the 1990s. Ringed seals were common in both eastern and western KB (ibid.). The relatively few polar bears encountered in this region during the 1990s was thus likely the result of hunting pressure rather than habitat suitability (Taylor et al. 2001).

### Skin Lesions

We documented hair loss (alopecia) and ulcerations on the feet of polar bears in Kane Basin during capture sampling in 2012 and 2013. These types of lesions have not been reported previously in the literature. Atwood et al. (2015b) documented an alopecia syndrome of unknown etiology amongst polar bears from the Southern Beaufort Sea (SB). However, those lesions were largely confined to the head, neck and shoulders rather than the feet. Additionally, they were most prevalent amongst subadult bears whereas those in KB were most common amongst adult males. Overall prevalence of lesions in KB bears (40% in 2012 and 2013) was higher than peak prevalence observed in the SB (28%). In particular, we note that seventy-five percent of adult males sampled in KB in 2012 and 2013 were affected. Lesions on adult males were also more severe than on other age classes as indicated by the presence of skin ulcerations some of which were apparently very painful. Atwood et al. (2015b) found that bears with

alopecia were in poorer body condition. What impact, if any, the lesions found on KB bears may have had on condition is unknown since sample sizes were too small to support analyses.

Whether the lesions reported in SB and KB share a common etiology (cause) is unknown. Discussions with Inuit hunters from Grise Fiord (near Kane Basin) suggest this phenomenon of hair loss on the feet is well known to occur in spring time (M. Akeeagok, J. Kiguktak, D. Akeeagok pers. comm.). It is believed that increased rates of movement in spring, when bears are mating and hunting activity is high, result in abrasions to the feet. Dog teams in the Canadian Arctic are well known get similar lesions in the spring when travelling over coarse, icing snow formed by melting and refreezing as temperatures fluctuate throughout the day (D. Iqqaqrialu pers. comm.). The condition may become so severe that some dogs become lame and unable to pull sleds. Snow cover on the sea-ice in KB in 2012 and 2013 was noticeably icy and granular in composition (Figure 13.4) with a hard ice-covered crust on top. It is therefore plausible that the lesions we observed were the result of snow conditions. The finding that prevalence was highest in adult males may be due to their greater weight and the likelihood that they break the ice crust while walking, combined with potentially increased time allocated to travelling in the spring while searching for estrous females<sup>1</sup>. Lesions similar to those observed in 2012 and 2013 were not seen on polar bears captured in KB between 1992 and 1997 (M. K. Taylor and E. W. Born, pers. comm.). Whether this is a new phenomenon in KB brought about by changing snow conditions and progressively warmer spring temperatures or an incidental observation in the years we were sampling bears is unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> Versus time spent stalking prey or resting

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**Table 13.1.** Body condition scores assigned to polar bears in Kane Basin during sampling in the 1990s (1992-1997) and 2010s (2012-2014). Within each epoch and sex-age class, the proportion of individuals in the two BCS categories is presented in parenthesis.

Sex-Age Class	Epoch	Body Condition Score		Test Result <sup>1</sup>
		Poor	Fair-Good	
Adult Male	1990s	5 (0.10)	44 (0.90)	$P = 1.000$
	2010s	5 (0.11)	40 (0.89)	
Adult Female (Lone)	1990s	9 (0.28)	23 (0.72)	$\chi^2 = 2.100$
	2010s	5 (0.14)	31 (0.86)	$P = 0.147$
Adult Female (w/COY <sup>2</sup> )	1990s	11 (0.42)	15 (0.58)	$\chi^2 = 1.922$
	2010s	6 (0.24)	19 (0.76)	$P = 0.166$
Adult Female (w/yearling)	1990s	8 (0.67)	4 (0.33)	$P = 0.015$
	2010s	2 (0.15)	11 (0.85)	
Subadults	1990s	4 (0.29)	10 (0.71)	$P = 0.037$
	2010s	0 (0.00)	16 (1.00)	

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated all tests results report values of  $P$  for Fisher's exact test (two-tailed)

<sup>2</sup> Cub-of-the-year (COY)

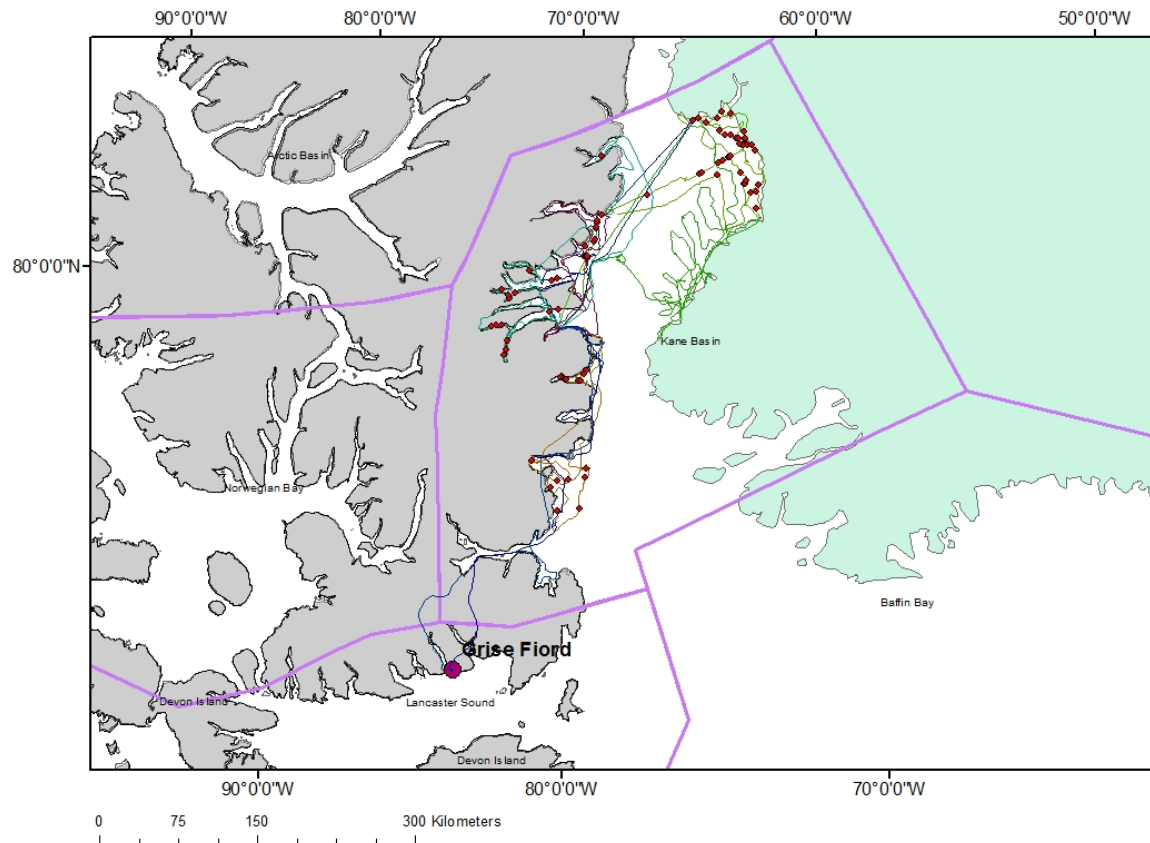
**Table 13.2.** Observations of recent feeding amongst polar bears encountered in Kane Basin, 2012-2014. Evidence of feeding includes presence of seal kills and bears encountered with full, pendulous stomachs.

<b>Sex-age class</b>	<b>Proportion Feeding (n)</b>
Adult Male	0.07 (46)
Adult Female (Lone)	0.17 (36)
Adult Female (with offspring)	0.26 (43)
Subadult	0.07 (16)

**Table 13.3.** Frequency of hair-loss (alopecia) and skin ulcerations on the feet of polar bears captured in Kane Basin, Nunavut, 2012 and 2013.

Sex-Age Class	No. of Individuals	Proportion	Proportion with
	Examined	with Alopecia	Ulcerations
Adult Male	12	0.75	0.75
Adult Female (Lone)	9	0.22	0.00
Adult Female (with COY)	7	0.29	0.00
Adult Female (with Yearling)	6	0.50	0.17
Adult Female (with 2-year-old)	1	0.00	0.00
Subadult	4	0.50	0.25
2-year-old	1	0.00	0.00
Yearling	8	0.63	0.25
Cub-of-the-year (COY)	11	0.00	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>0.22</b>





**Figure 13.1.** Distribution of seal observations during polar bear mark-recapture sampling in Kane Basin, 2013. Flight tracks are shown.



**Figure 13.2.** Examples of alopecia over the feet of polar bears handled in Kane Basin, April/May 2012 and 2013.



**Figure 13.3.** Examples of ulcerative lesions on the feet of polar bears handled in Kane Basin, April/May 2012 and 2013.





**Figure 13.4.** An example of the granular snow found in many parts of Kane basin during polar bear sampling in April/May 2012 and 2013.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION AND ADVICE TO THE JOINT COMMISSION**

#### **14.1. Conclusions**

In 2010, the Canada-Greenland Joint Commission on Polar Bear (JC) tasked the Scientific Working Group with using the best available scientific information to (1) propose Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) levels for the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations and provide the JC with a written report of its recommendations, and (2) provide science advice to the JC for monitoring the effects of habitat changes on polar bears. Given the age of the mark-recapture data on which abundance and vital rates for BB and KB were estimated combined with large-scale environmental changes in Baffin Bay during the last decades and suspected large-scale environmental changes in Kane Basin in recent time, the SWG strongly recommended that new estimates of subpopulation abundance, population delineation, and vital rates be given high priority.

Based on the decisions of the JC that physical MR should not be used in this study a multi-year programs began in 2011 (BB) and 2012 (KB) to re-assess the size of both subpopulations using genetic mark-recapture (MR) techniques that involved biopsy sampling from both live and harvested polar bears. In addition, satellite transmitters were deployed on male and female polar bears in NW Greenland during 2009-2013 to study polar bear movement and habitat choice and to gather data for planning and interpretation of the genetic MR study in Baffin Bay. With the same purpose satellite transmitters were deployed on male and female polar bears in both the Canadian (Nunavut) and Greenland parts of Kane Basin in 2012 and

2013. In addition, a helicopter-based aerial survey was flown in Kane Basin in spring 2014 concomitantly with the MR operation to evaluate the feasibility of estimating KB abundance with an aerial survey flown over springtime sea ice.

A total of 2,690 genetic samples were collected from live and harvested polar bears in BB and KB, 125 satellite transmitters were deployed, and 4,160 linear km of transects flown during the aerial survey in KB as part of the overall research program. In addition, many hours were subsequently spent processing samples; analyzing genetic, aerial survey, and sea-ice data; in discussion interpreting the results; and, writing this report.

The study has resulted in new estimates of abundance of polar bears in the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations and provided significant and comprehensive information about polar bear ecology and sea-ice dynamics in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin. The results of this program are described in detail in Chapters 2 through 13. They are also summarized concisely in the Executive Summary document.

## **14.2. Lessons from Genetic Mark-Recapture**

The SWG recommended that physical mark-recapture be used for assessing the size of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations. However, as described in Chapter 1 the Canada-Greenland Joint Commission decided to use genetic mark-recapture for assessment.

The Baffin Bay and Kane Basin studies represent the first time that genetic mark-recapture has been implemented at population-wide scales for estimating polar bear abundance and demographic rates. As such, these studies provide valuable information about the utility of genetic mark-recapture as a monitoring tool for assessing polar bear subpopulations ranging over

large areas like Baffin Bay with dynamic sea-ice conditions, and how the technique may be most successfully implemented in the future.

Sampling via biopsy darting was highly successful in yielding tissue samples suitable for genotyping in both Baffin Bay and Kane Basin (Chapters 5 and 10) essential if genetic mark-recapture is to be implemented in other subpopulations.

Moreover, genetic analyses identified that reporting of marked bears in the harvest is incomplete; specifically, decreases in reporting are related to greater marker age, suggesting that the loss of physical markers (loss of ear tags and fading of lip tattoos) over time makes it difficult for hunters to correctly identify marked bears. As such, we encourage the use of genetics for identifying marked bears in the harvest in the future; for those subpopulations not inventoried via genetic mark-recapture, this will require genotyping archived samples as well (see also [3] below).

Collecting samples for genotyping via biopsy darting is generally fast, efficient, and less invasive than physical mark-recapture, since bears are not immobilized (Chapter 5). Because biopsying for genetic MR estimation is less time consuming than handling individual bears during physical MR operations genetic MR has the potential of resulting in more “marks” and “recaptures” which theoretically improve precision of estimates of abundance in MR. In Baffin Bay success in sampling a large number of biopsies in the huge coastal distribution areas within a relatively short time was obtained by using three helicopters (2 along eastern Baffin Island and 1 in NW Greenland) during the same time in fall. Using three helicopters during fall biopsying for several years inevitably increased the costs of the surveys.

In physical mark-recapture information on a recapture is obtained from direct physical inspection of the presence of numbered ear tags and/or a number in the lips. Data on marking

and recapture is therefore readily at hand for analyses. In contrast, during genetic mark-recapture the information on whether a biopsied bear was a “recapture” or not is not obtained until after genetic analyses are conducted in a qualified laboratory. This adds a delay in the analyses. In our case the commitment of the contracted laboratory, one that is recognized world-wide as an expert and of high quality, to undertake other genetic analyses caused a serious delay in processing the polar bear samples. This resulted in a delay in data analyses for the abundance estimation.

However, there were trade-offs with the genetic mark-recapture method that resulted in lack of information that would have been available with a physical capture protocol. Physical mark-recapture provides a wider range of information including estimates of rates of birth and death, detailed age-structure and body condition information, and a suite of physical samples can further inform individual and population status. Because bears had to be identified from the air using genetic MR, there is uncertainty in the age structure especially for younger bears. Overall, physical mark-recapture permits a more comprehensive assessment of population status, as previously recommended by SWG (2010).

Furthermore, even if physical mark-recapture is not used for assessment, some physical capture is necessary for studies at this scale to provide data on movements of bears and habitat use. In this study, 139 bears were captured in West Greenland, and of these 38 adult females with collars informed both the mark-recapture assessment itself (e.g., temporary emigration analyses, range sizes) as well as provided key information on changes in sea-ice habitat use that set the mark-recapture results into context.

Research in the Kane Basin subpopulation during 2014 illustrated that aerial survey and genetic mark-recapture methods can be implemented simultaneously (Chapters 10 and 11) to



generate more comprehensive demographic information and to ensure efficient and representative allocation of sampling effort. In the present study we illustrate that combining the two methods simultaneously is feasible for subpopulations which are surveyed on sea ice during spring and which have a relatively small geographical distribution like the Kane Basin subpopulation. However, using a helicopter like we did with a relatively short range for both biopsy and aerial surveys at the same time may be suboptimal. Using only a single helicopter limits the ability to expand survey effort to offshore polar bear habitat with loose drift ice and open water as demonstrated in our study where a substantial portion of the KB subpopulation's range could not be surveyed (also for safety reasons) leading to an abundance estimate which was negatively biased to an unknown extent.

With genetic mark-recapture, the ability to leverage historical data to improve estimates of survival is limited by the availability of archived samples for genotyping. For both Baffin Bay and Kane Basin, tissues samples suitable for genotyping were available for most – but not all – bears initially marked during research in the 1990s. This lack of tissue samples for a small proportion of the sampled population necessitated identifying those individuals which could still be alive (based on harvest records and age at time of first capture; Chapters 5 and 10) and fixing their recapture probabilities during the 2010s sampling to zero. Although this solution complicated analyses, it enabled us to incorporate historical capture data. Moreover, the large sampling interval between the past and present BB and KB studies did not favor recoveries of old “marks” that also could have assisted in improving some vital rates. If successive population studies are envisaged within a 10-15 year time frame, then a single-year biopsy sampling session should be implemented 5-7 years after the study was completed in order to increase or maintain

marks in the population that can be recovered through either harvest or the subsequent new study.

During physical mark-recapture individual age is obtained from every single bear that is handled and marked. During immobilization a vestigial tooth is extracted and individual age is obtained from reading growth-layers in the cementum. This allow for implementing age-structured models for estimating abundance and vital parameters. The fact that individual ages are not obtained from bears that are biopsied during genetic mark-recapture represents a limitation on *post hoc* analyses as indicated in Chapter 5. Hence, we implemented only coarse age structures for demographic analyses, pooling individuals  $\geq 2$  years and  $\geq 3$  years for the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin studies, respectively (Chapters 5 and 10). Thus, survival could not be estimated for 2 year olds and subadults separately from adults. Ancillary data suggest that experienced biologists may be able to discriminate among finer age classes (i.e., 2 – 4 year old subadults versus adults  $\geq 5$  years) with a high degree of accuracy for adults and a lesser degree for subadults (Appendix B), particularly since the sex of individuals is confirmed via genetics (Appendix B). As such, genetic mark-recapture may have the potential to yield estimates of survival and reproductive output that are relevant to management and comparable to previous research however more work needs to be done (e.g., Taylor et al. 2005, 2008a, Peacock et al. 2013). However, it must be kept in mind that field-estimation of individual age during genetic mark-recapture relies heavily upon the individual researcher's experience in assigning polar bears to more specific age classes.

We completed a detailed review of historical records to assess previous research in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin. These reviews proved critical to our interpretation of results, as apparent changes in the sampling frames between epochs (i.e., incomplete spatial sampling during the

1990s, relative to the 2010s) limited our ability to assess trends in abundance. However, we were not able to locate original and detailed data files from the physical mark-recapture study and telemetry study conducted in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin in the 1990s. This finding underscores the need to archive data securely and for complete and consistent sampling of the study areas. We recommend that any polar bear study archives data securely at institutes that were central in the collaborative studies to allow future studies to thoroughly assess historical inventories to ensure proper interpretation of results. For the same reason, the Canada/Nunavut/Greenland institutes that conducted the recent study in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin have signed a contract where collaborating institutes have access to and must securely archive all data stemming from the joint study.

We defined and stratified the study areas for recent inventories based on recent telemetry data (and historical capture records). For this purpose, data obtained from satellite transmitters deployed in West and Northwest Greenland in 2009 and 2010 for other purposes proved to be an important tool. This process improved our allocation of effort and ensured that results reflected the entire subpopulations as best as possible. Satellite telemetry data (both historical from the 1990s and recent from 2009-2014) were also used to interpret *post-hoc* to what extent the biopsy samplings in the 1990s and 2000s were for the entire subpopulations in BB and KB. Hence, information on movement and area occupancy obtained from satellite telemetry is an essential tool in mark-recapture studies of polar bears.

Finally, the telemetry data identified that 18% of the adult females collared in West Greenland remained in Melville Bay for a least one summer season and in some cases for over a year. There would be value in future work investigating what fraction of the BB subpopulation uses Melville Bay year-round. This could make use of the existing genetic marks from this

study, with the addition of one or two sampling seasons in fall in Melville Bay only. Densities appeared low based on observations during data collection in 2012 and 2013 however there would be value in quantifying this using more detailed sampling of the area.

In conclusion, the present study has shown that a genetic mark-recapture assessment of a polar bear subpopulation at a large scale is possible. However, such a study would likely involve an absolute minimum of three years of sampling and, subsequently, additional time for laboratory analysis of samples, analysis of data, and report writing. Thus, these timelines must be considered in advance if timely information on abundance for management is paramount. In this study, our reporting of abundance of polar bears in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin is given 5+ years after initiation of the study in 2011.

### **14.3. Recommendations on Sustainable Harvest**

Historically, the management of polar bears assumed that their sea-ice habitat was relatively stable and, once subpopulation size was known, conservation of polar bears could be achieved through harvest management (SWG 2011). The sustainable harvest of a subpopulation would, therefore, be largely dependent on an estimation of abundance, demographic rates (e.g., birth and death vital rates), and the magnitude, and sex and age composition of the harvest. Since the 1980s, management and conservation of polar bears, particularly in Canada, has been informed by predictive modelling, which has provided guidance to managers on the setting of sustainable harvest levels that have been based on a better understanding of the risk associated with different harvest scenarios (Taylor et al. 1987b, 2002, 2005). The primary predictive model used, RISKMAN (Taylor et al. 2001), focused on harvest management and did not account for

any future change in survival or birth rates during the period over which the simulations were run. Furthermore it did not include changes in carrying capacity (K).

Based on demographic rates derived from pooled subpopulation data collected across the Canadian High Arctic in the 1970s and 1980s, modeling indicated that under optimal conditions the sustainable yield of adult females is typically <1.6% of the total population (Taylor et al. 1987a). Hence, level of total sustainable catch (C) was inferred from this relationship (PBSG 1998):  $C = N * 0.015 / \text{sex ratio in harvest}$ ; where N is subpopulation size, 0.015 is the sustainable rate of harvest of adult (independent) females from the population, and the denominator is the ratio of adult females in the harvest. Hence, the ratio of adult female bears in the harvest was important for the sustainable total yield. Using this relationship and a general 2:1 sex ratio of males to females in the harvest, the historical standard for the harvest rate of polar bear subpopulations has been 4.5%, which was based on a 2:1 sex ratio of males to females and, initially, on generalized demographic rates derived from pooled subpopulation data collected across the Canadian High Arctic in the 1970s and 1980s (Taylor et al. 1987a, b). More recently, as more studies were undertaken and additional analytical methods developed, it became clear that demographic rates were subpopulation specific (e.g., Amstrup et al. 2001, Taylor et al. 2002, 2005, PBSG 2006, Taylor et al. 2006, Regehr et al. 2007, PBSG 2010). In their recent development of a matrix-based demographic model for polar bears, Regehr et al. (2015) noted that harvest management based on this standard rate and the 2:1 male-biased sex ratio is reasonable under many biological and management conditions; although in some cases, lower or higher rates may be more appropriate.

The ultimate threat to polar bears throughout their range is the reduction in sea-ice habitat expanse, duration, and quality as a consequence of climate change (Derocher et al. 2004, Laidre

et al. 2008, 2015a, Wiig et al. 2015). At their 2009 Meeting in Tromsø, Norway, the Polar Bear Range States agreed that the impacts of climate change constitute the most important threat to polar bear conservation (Polar Bear Range States 2015). Hence, the effective and sound management of polar bears can no longer rely solely on estimates of abundance but must also incorporate impacts of a changing environment (e.g., loss of ice and reduction in carrying capacity). In addition, as other threats (i.e., pollution, resource exploration and development, tourism) become better understood, management of polar bear subpopulations will need to be modified, particularly if reproduction or survival rates are negatively affected (Vongraven and Peacock 2011, Vongraven et al. 2012). Thus, understanding the risks associated with a range of harvest management options is important for polar bear conservation.

One of the stated purposes and objectives of the 2009 Canada-Nunavut-Greenland Memorandum of Understanding is to manage polar bears within the KB and BB management units in order to ensure their conservation and sustainable management into the future (Anon. 2009). The SWG was subsequently tasked with proposing Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) levels for both the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin subpopulations (Chapter 1) but was not provided with any specific guidance on management goals.

To facilitate the ability of the SWG to provide the Joint Commission (JC) with useful recommendations on TAH, the SWG requested that the JC provide:

- 1) A statement of management objectives for each subpopulation,
- 2) Information on the expected frequency and intensity of future monitoring, and
- 3) A statement of risk tolerance with respect to the effects of human caused removals.

As a consequence of not receiving the necessary information from the JC on which to base recommendations on TAH despite repeated requests, the SWG is currently unable to

provide these recommendations. Specific objectives for the management and conservation of BB and KB polar bears are critical as these will largely influence recommendations on TAH, which in turn will ensure that decision makers have all the necessary information available to them. Risk tolerance and management objectives are not decisions to be made by scientific staff but rather by those with management authority for the resource and, ideally, made after consideration of not only subsistence harvest but also other sources of human-caused removals (e.g., human-bear interactions) and after consultation with all stakeholders.

Once the JC provides the requested information, the SWG strongly recommends that subsequent advice on TAH be based on population simulations using models that have the ability to incorporate changing sea-ice conditions (e.g., reductions in carrying capacity) and demographic data quality as part of the overall process to assess risk under different harvest management scenarios. For example, Regehr et al. (2015) developed a state-dependent management framework that linked the demographic model to simulated population assessments, which can be used to estimate the maximum sustainable rate of human-caused removals. It can also be used to calculate a recommended sustainable harvest rate, which Regehr et al. (2015) note is generally lower than the maximum sustainable rate because it is dependent on management objectives, the precision and frequency of population data, and risk tolerance.

#### **14.4. Recommendations on Monitoring Habitat Change on Polar Bears**

There have been numerous reports regarding the effects of climate change and in particular the loss of sea ice, on polar bears (Derocher et al. 1994, Laidre et al. 2008, Wiig et al. 2008). Changes in distribution of polar bears in several populations including in BB have been summarized by Stirling and Parkinson (2006). Furthermore, information on local observations

of the effects of climate change on polar bears in BB made by hunters and elders have been presented by Dowsley (2005), Dowsley and Taylor (2006), and Dowsley and Wenzel (2008) for eastern Baffin Island and by Born et al. (2008a, b, 2011) based on interviews with experienced polar bear hunters NW Greenland. These sources indicate that polar bears in BB (and likely also KB) currently are affected by large-scale environmental changes.

Monitoring habitat change will improve our understanding of the relationship between BB and KB polar bears and the environment. It provides insights into how factors such as sea ice and prey abundance and availability affect polar bear distribution and vital rates. The results of the habitat assessment work conducted in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin since 2009, largely based on satellite telemetry data from collared adult female polar bears, have provided a wealth of new information on habitat and habitat change, which directly inform the status of the BB and KB subpopulations (Chapters 2, 4, and 9). The movement information has also assisted in interpreting the BB and KB abundance and demographic data, which were associated with some biases that could be addressed through the use of the telemetry data (Chapter 3).

Vongraven et al (2012) developed a circumpolar monitoring framework for polar bears, which was focused on the sustained long-term monitoring necessary to understand ongoing effects of climate warming and other population-level stressors in order to inform management and policy responses to changing worldwide polar bear status and trends. The current scientific understanding of polar bears and their reliance on sea-ice habitats is the result of long-term monitoring that has been conducted in only a few subpopulations. There is variability in the response of each subpopulation to loss of sea ice, as manifested in this study through the differences in responses in KB and BB despite roughly the same rates of sea-ice loss (Chapters 4 and 9). Therefore it is critical that scientific studies be conducted within the subpopulation(s) of



interest to gain an in depth understanding of the complex ecological ramifications of climate change in that area (e.g., Rode et al. 2014), rather than making assumptions based on studies in other areas that may have different responses.

The BB and KB satellite telemetry studies allowed for comparison and quantification of range use across decades, seasons and months, changes in overlap of the population range over time, shifts in median latitude of bears across seasons, changes in immigration and emigration across subpopulation boundaries, changes in movement rates, shifts in sea ice and terrestrial habitat use and habitat selection, and changes in maternity denning timing, and changes in maternity denning areas and habitat. Though not included in the report, time series from captures in BB and KB provide information on causal links between factors that determine health, nutritional ecology and population-level processes. Analyses have been initiated (using samples from recent BB captures) and are expected to provide new information on feeding and nutritional ecology.

The SWG concludes that future physical capture and satellite tagging studies in BB and KB (collaring and tracking adult female bears for periods of years) will be critical to extending the current time series and informing managers of the impacts of sea-ice habitat loss. Given the large physical changes documented in this study, and clear responses of polar bears in both areas, continuation of the time series of satellite telemetry data will improve our understanding of the impacts of future biotic and abiotic changes on the two subpopulations. The satellite telemetry studies should be conducted on intervals of 10 years or less, with samples sizes roughly equivalent to those collected in the 1991-1997 and 2009-2013 (approximately 40 adult females tracked over a period of several years). Lower sample sizes will make assessments more difficult due to individual variability and lack of model convergence (as seen for KB).

By use of satellite telemetry, the present study documented that a group of adult female polar bears occur year round at glacier fronts in Melville Bay in NW Greenland (Chapter 2). To protect important polar bear habitat the Melville Bay Nature Reserve was established in 1980. All access and hunting within the central zone of the nature reserve is prohibited (Appendix D). The (re-)establishment of a local group of polar bears with affinity to Melville Bay appears to be relatively recent and is likely an effect of the protection places on this important polar bear habitat. Satellite telemetry in the 2000s has also shown females to be denning in the Melville Bay Nature Reserve. When the areas were surveyed during spring 1992 and 1993 very little signs of polar bear activity were observed in the nature reserve and of the 1990s satellite telemetry indicated that adult females did not use the Melville Bay (Chapter 2).

Hence, recent data indicate that the Melville Bay Nature Reserve represents an example of how important polar bear habitat can be protected resulting in polar bears reestablishing groups "locally" in prime habitat. Hence, the nature reserve exemplifies a means of protecting polar bears in the future. However, the broader effect of the nature reserve on polar bears should be followed. This can be done by regularly conducting a genetic mark-recapture estimation of trends in numbers in the local group of bears (baseline genetic data now exist from the present study) and by tracking individuals by use of satellite telemetry at 5-10 years intervals.

Continued assessment of changes in habitat in BB and KB via satellite-based observation of sea ice (passive microwave data, MODIS, or Radar images) provide useful context for changes in the physical environment. Arctic sea ice is the most critical habitat for the survival of polar bear subpopulations as distribution and timing of ice relative to critical phases of polar bear life history have been linked to subpopulation status and trend (Stirling et al. 1999, Hunter et al. 2010, Regehr et al. 2010). The SWG recommends continued monitoring of sea-ice habitat

change through these studies (described herein as well as Stern and Laidre 2016). Furthermore, contrasting changes in BB and KB with other polar bear subpopulations provides an important baseline for comparison.

Continued development and refinement of habitat models will be necessary in the future to identify habitat selection changes and better predict critical habitat in BB and KB.

Standardized methods of developing habitat models (resource selection functions, RSFs) for polar bears have been developed for several subpopulations (Mauritzen et al. 2003, Ferguson et al. 2000, Durner et al. 2004, 2006, Wilson et al. 2014, Laidre et al. 2015b, Chapters 4 and 9) and within a large part of polar bear range (Durner et al. 2009). RSFs are developed from satellite radio telemetry data of adult female bears and readily available sea-ice data in geographic information system (GIS) format. Habitat models are powerful tools for predicting the occurrence of terrestrial den habitat (Howlin et al. 2002, Richardson et al. 2005). Knowledge of the distribution of maternal den habitat has significant management potential to protect polar bears in dens. Trends in sea-ice den habitat may be estimated by monitoring sea-ice conditions as changes in the composition of sea ice has been linked to changes in den distribution (Fischbach et al. 2007).

Habitat availability and change have been linked to polar bear demography and/or condition in some subpopulations (Regehr et al. 2007, Bromaghin et al. 2015, Lunn et al. 2016). Quantitative links between habitat and demographic parameters are complex and need to be refined and specific to the subpopulation of interest. Continued habitat monitoring will improve the understanding between the links to demography and productivity for both BB and KB.

Stable isotope (Bentzen et al. 2007), fatty acid analysis (Iverson et al. 2006), and lipid content in adipose tissues (McKinney et al. 2014) conducted from blood, fat and hair collected

during captures can provide information on the polar bear prey base and help to identify shifts in food webs and body condition in BB and KB. This information can be used in concert with information on movements and habitat use from the telemetry to better inform how bears use the ecosystem. While some of this information can be collected from harvest sampling, physical capture of polar bears provides opportunities that are not available from harvest samples (e.g., collection of samples from the same individuals over time).

Continued monitoring of TEK and LEK in BB and KB will also be critical for providing information on how changes in sea ice are impacting the polar bear hunt (e.g., hunting practices), the overall harvest, and the condition of bears harvested. Local perspectives on changes both to the physical environment and the population are important inputs to managers. Repeated studies with a robust interview study design and data collection process (e.g., Born et al. 2011) are needed.

Finally continued subsistence harvest monitoring is needed in both Canada and Greenland, providing critical information on numbers, sex ratios and ages of bears taken in both areas. In this study, this information provided important content into changes in harvest patterns and composition of the harvest (Chapter 8). Genetic validation of the sex of individual bears (as reported by the hunters) showed that the gender was incorrectly reported in a significant number of cases. Improvement in gender reporting is needed; inaccuracies in gender reporting were greatest in Greenland.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A.** List of Scientific Working Group members and external experts involved in the re-assessment of the Baffin Bay and Kane Basin polar bear subpopulations.

Scientific Working Group Members	External Experts
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**APPENDIX B.** The accuracy of estimating polar bear age-class and sex from helicopter-based, aerial observations: Implications for the use of non-invasive survey methods in monitoring subpopulations.

## INTRODUCTION

Although some subpopulations of polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) have been studied and monitored for more than 4 decades (e.g., Stirling et al. 1977, Lunn et al. 2016), there is considerable variation in the depth and scope of knowledge across their circumpolar range (Vongraven et al. 2012). Large gaps in basic information exist. Growing concerns about the impacts of climate change, increasing industrial development, harvest and contaminants in the Arctic have prompted range state governments, researchers, environmental organizations and local communities to call for an enhanced and coordinated circumpolar monitoring effort (Vongraven et al. 2012, Range States 2015).

Polar bears typically have been monitored by means of physical mark-recapture. This method has yielded detailed demographic data, allowing researchers to assess the status of subpopulations and closely examine the impacts of climate change and other threats. Hence, physical mark recapture provides tissue samples and samples of e.g., blood and milk which have been used in a wealth of studies of health and pollution in polar bear populations (e.g., Regehr et al. 2007, Hunter et al. 2010, Sonne 2010, Peacock et al. 2013, Bromaghin et al. 2015, Lunn et al. 2016). However, gaps in knowledge and the demand for rapid dissemination of up-to-date information have generated interest in the use of alternative methods for monitoring polar bears. Aerial surveys have proven to be an effective and expedient way of assessing abundance in polar bear subpopulations even in subpopulations with a large range (Aars et al. 2009, Stapleton et al.

2014, 2016). Genetic mark-recapture (Herreman and Peacock 2013, Pagano et al. 2014, Chapters 5 and 10) and remote sensing (Stapleton et al. 2014) may also offer viable alternatives in situations where logistical and financial limitations preclude the use of physical mark-recapture or where concerns about the impacts of handling bears outweigh the benefits (Vongraven et al. 2012).

Aerial surveys are widely used for monitoring wildlife populations. Unlike physical mark-recapture studies where individuals are captured, marked and released, aerial surveys do not provide detailed demographic data such as estimates of birth rates and survival that can be used to project population growth. Nevertheless, aerial surveys, which only rely on one season are an effective means of yielding a snapshot of estimates of abundance/status. Inferences about population trends can be derived from repeated aerial surveys. In addition to estimating abundance, aerial surveys can also provide information on spatial distribution, sex and age composition, body condition and reproductive performance that can be used to facilitate population status assessment (e.g., Stapleton et al. 2014). In contrast to genetic and physical mark-recapture estimation, which relies on several years of sampling, aerial surveys can provide an estimate of abundance from only one season of study.

Genetic mark-recapture has been increasingly used for wildlife population monitoring (Palsbøll et al. 1997, Boersen et al. 2003, Boulanger et al. 2004, Kendall et al. 2009). Like aerial surveys, genetic mark-recapture does not require the capture and physical handling of individuals. Tissue samples are collected for genotyping and identification of individuals by methods such as biopsy darting or hair-snagging. With protocols such as biopsy darting, individuals can be observed from a distance, facilitating collection of additional information on

sex, age class and body condition. However, the reliability of this ancillary information depends on the ability to correctly classify individuals by sex and age class.

Using data collected during two recent genetic mark recapture studies of polar bears in the Baffin Bay (BB) and Kane Basin (KB) subpopulations, we assessed the accuracy of classifying polar bears into sex and age classes from the air without physical handling. From a sample of bears of known sex and age class, we examined variation in accuracy of classification dependent on the method of survey (aerial vs genetic mark-recapture) and amongst sex-age classes. We discuss the implications of the results for expanding the utility of aerial survey and genetic mark-recapture as less invasive methods for monitoring species status.

## **METHODS**

### **Study Area**

The boundaries of the BB polar bear subpopulation (BB) encompass an area ~1 million km<sup>2</sup> in Baffin Bay, covering portions of Baffin Island and all Bylot Island (66.2° N to 73.8° N) in Nunavut/ Canada and parts of West and Northwest Greenland (66.0° N to 77.0° N; Taylor et al. 2005). BB is bounded by Greenland to the east, Baffin Island to the west, the North Water polynya in the north and Davis Strait to the south. Three communities in Nunavut and 37 communities in Greenland harvest bears from BB, although the majority of the Greenland harvest is taken between *ca.* 72° and 76° N. Baffin Bay is ice-covered in winter but typically ice-free in summer. During late spring and summer break-up, sea ice recedes from Greenland westward across Baffin Bay; the last remnants of ice typically occur off the coast of Baffin Island. Most polar bears remain on the sea ice as it recedes and then come ashore to spend the

ice-retreat period on Baffin and Bylot Islands (Taylor et al. 2005). A small number of bears remain on land in northwestern Greenland throughout the ice-retreat period.

The KB polar bear subpopulation covers roughly 150,000 km<sup>2</sup> and spans portions of Nunavut, Canada, including Ellesmere Island, as well as northwestern Greenland (Taylor et al. 2008). However, the boundaries of the KB subpopulation encompasses a substantial amount of land and glaciers so that the essential sea ice polar bear habitat only amounts to less than one half of the area enclosed by the borders of the management unit; *cf.* Figure 13.1). The subpopulation ranges over Kane Basin, Nares Strait, Smith Sound and adjacent fjords on eastern Ellesmere Island and Northwest Greenland (the Qaanaaq area). It is bounded to the north by the Arctic Basin subpopulation (via the Kennedy Channel), to the south by the BB and LS subpopulations, and to the west by Norwegian Bay (NW). Kane Basin forms part of the Arctic archipelago ecoregion (Amstrup et al. 2008); sea ice remains present in the northern range (i.e., Nares Strait-Kane Basin) throughout the year, largely due to the movement of polar pack ice from Arctic Basin, and reaches a minimum in late summer. However, in recent decades, sea ice conditions in KB have changed markedly (Chapter 9)

#### Genetic Mark-Recapture Study

Genetic mark-recapture studies were conducted in BB and KB between 2011-2013 and 2012-2014 respectively (Chapters 5 and 10 in this report). Sampling of bears in BB occurred from late August to mid- October along the east coast of Baffin Island and around Bylot Island, Canada. During this period, bears were on land in a variety of habitats ranging from flat coastal plains and beaches to steep rocky slopes and glaciers. Bears were observed against different backgrounds including sand, rocks, low lying vegetation, snow and water. Sampling in KB



occurred in April and May while bears were on the sea ice. Bears were observed on a range of sea-ice types including flat, shorefast ice, consolidated pack-ice and unconsolidated pack-ice.

Using a helicopter (Bell 206 LongRanger), we searched for and biopsy darted polar bears using methods described previously (Chapters 5 and 10). Upon encounter, the sex and age class (cub-of-the-year [COY], yearling, subadult [ages 2 – 4], and adult) of each bear was estimated from the air at a range of 3 – 7 m above ground. The individual identity and sex of each bear was later confirmed via genetic analysis (Chapter 5 and 11). In estimating age-class and sex, the observer used multiple cues, including the size of an individual relative to its surrounding environment or accompanying bears, membership in a family group (mothers and cubs or yearlings), secondary sexual characteristics (adult males; e.g., fore-leg guard hairs), body shape and proportions, the presence of scars (which are most often seen on adult males) and observations of urination (i.e., urine dribbling from under the tail of females). Field notes, and in some cases photographs, also assisted in *post-hoc* reassessment of age-sex class once genetic sex was known. All observations were made by experienced polar bear biologists who had previously participated in physical mark-recapture studies.

At the time of encounter, observers had no prior knowledge of the sex or age class of bears. However, amongst the individuals encountered, a proportion were of known sex and age class based on one or more lines of evidence (Table B1), including a number of bears whose genotypes matched those of bears handled during physical mark-recapture studies in BB (Taylor et al. 2005), KB (Taylor et al. 2008, Chapter 10 in this report) and Davis Strait (Peacock et al. 2013). We assessed the accuracy of remote classification using this sample of ‘known’ bears and examined two scenarios. The first scenario simulated the outcome of an aerial survey in which the sex of bears cannot be confirmed via genotyping. Sex and age classification under this

scenario therefore relies solely on field observation. The second scenario simulated a genetic mark-recapture, whereby inaccuracies in field sexing of bears can be corrected following genotyping and field notes made at the time of observation can be used to make *post-hoc* adjustments to age class once genetic sex is known<sup>1</sup>.

We restricted our analyses to bears that were sub adults or adults at time of encounter due to small sample sizes for COYs and yearlings and because these dependent offspring can be easily identified when part of a family group (> 96% and 91% accurate for COY and yearlings respectively; GN unpublished data from Davis Strait). Our analysis was a simple comparison of the estimated and known frequencies of bears in each sex and age class under these two scenarios.

## RESULTS

During genetic mark-recapture studies in BB and KB, 2011-2014, there were 309 encounters with individuals classified from the air as adult females based on the presence of accompanying offspring (either COY or yearlings), including 29 instances in which the sex and age class of the adult female was also known from capture and physical examination (n = 2) and tooth aging (n = 27) on a prior or future occasion. Twenty-five adult females were subject to aerial classification during fall when they were accompanied by COY (n = 12) or yearlings (n = 4) and 4 were classified during spring (3 with COY, 1 with yearlings). All adult females with dependent offspring were correctly classified from the air.

In addition to adult females with accompanying offspring, we recorded 128 unencumbered bears of known sex and age class (Table B2). Aerial classification of these bears without subsequent genotyping and reclassification based on genetic sex (i.e., the aerial survey scenario) resulted in an overall accuracy of 73%. For lone adults, 95% males and 74% of females were

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<sup>1</sup> An example of a field note used for post-hoc adjustment of age class would be: "*If not female is a sub adult male*".

correctly classified. Inaccuracies were greatest amongst subadult bears. Although 70% of subadults were correctly classified, only 23% were correctly classified as sub adults of a particular sex.

Aerial classification combined with subsequent reclassification based on genetic sex, field notes and photographs (i.e., the genetic mark-recapture scenario) resulted in an overall accuracy of 91% amongst the 128 known age, independent bears. Again, accuracy varied by sex and age class (Figure B1); accuracy was highest for adult males (97%) and lowest for sub adult females (79%) (Table B3).

## **DISCUSSION**

One of the criteria used to classify adult females was the presence of dependent offspring (COY or yearling) at the time of aerial observation or during a prior encounter. Use of this criterion was based on the assumption that accuracy in identifying females with offspring of this age was at, or near 100%. Although the sample size was relatively small, our results support this assumption and the validity of this age classification criterion. All of the adult females with offspring whose age could also be confirmed by tooth aging or physical examination were correctly classified from the air. However, we did not have any adult females accompanied by 2-year-olds in our sample of known-aged bears so we were unable to test the accuracy of classifying adult females based on the presence of 2-year-old offspring nor were we able to test accuracy in classifying 2-year-olds themselves.

Our results suggest that experienced observers can estimate the sex and age class of bears from the air with high accuracy for most sex and age classes, particularly when aerial observations are combined with genetic sexing, field notes and photographs. These findings are consistent with results from a similar study using a larger dataset of known-age bears ( $n = 445$

based on tooth aging) from Davis Strait in which aerial observers correctly classified 97%, 88%, 80% and 80% of adult males, adult females, subadult males and subadult females respectively (GN unpublished data).

Not surprisingly, the greatest inaccuracies occur in classifying subadult bears. While the ability to classify an individual as a subadult is reasonably good from the air, the ability to determine the sex of subadult bears based on aerial observation alone is poor. Another area of potential inaccuracy that we were unable to test was the identification of independent yearlings. In some polar bear subpopulations, a proportion of yearlings are found alone during the summer or fall; presumably having been weaned (Derocher and Stirling 1995, 2012, Stirling et al. 1999). In Baffin Bay during the 1990s, approximately 6% of yearlings encountered during mark-recapture sampling were independent (GN unpublished data). The extent to which weaning of yearlings is occurring in BB at present is unknown. Of 16 bears recaptured as yearlings during genetic mark-recapture sampling from 2011 to 2013, all were still with their mother, but this small sample size limits inferences. However, in Western Hudson Bay, the proportion of yearlings that are independent during the fall has declined dramatically from > 81% prior to 1980 to almost zero at present (Stirling and Derocher 2012). This decline in early weaning of offspring has occurred in association with changing sea-ice conditions leading to the suggestion that early weaning is associated with favorable environmental conditions. Given trends in sea ice in BB (Laidre et al. 2015), a reduction in the proportions of independent yearlings may also be occurring. The number of independent yearlings encountered during our genetic mark-recapture was likely negligible.

Based on the accuracy of classification documented in this study, we conclude that the sex and age class data derived from aerial surveys or genetic mark-recapture studies can provide

reliable data to support monitoring and assessment of population status. From aerial observations, adult males, adult females, COY, and yearlings can be identified with high accuracy. Subadult age classes also can be accurately determined, but classification by sex is poor. Combined with genetic sexing, field notes and photographs, accuracy is improved for all classes of bears. While we cannot derive specific ages for bears from aerial observations, such data do support monitoring the basic age structure of subpopulations. In addition, with genetic mark-recapture, there is an opportunity to model survival of specific age classes, albeit with a degree of uncertainty. For example, remote classification of sex and age classes does not permit modeling senescent age classes, nor can we model the transition from subadult to adult age classes with certainty. Finally, given the accuracy in identifying adult females and their dependent COY and yearling offspring, reproductive indices such as litters size and recruitment (yearlings per adult female) can be reliably obtained.

In our genetic mark-recapture studies in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin approximately one-third and two-thirds of sampling, respectively, occurred for bears of known age class based on our criteria (Table B1). The higher proportion of known age bears in Kane Basin was the result of physical captures completed to deploy satellite telemetry instruments. For the two thirds and one third of bears of ‘unknown’ age that were age classed based on aerial observations, genetic sex, field notes and photographs we can be confident in the accuracy of those classifications. For mark-recapture analyses, we adopted a coarser age class structure than was assessed in the present study due to concerns about the ability to remotely classify bears (Chapters 5 and 10). Our findings suggest that the accuracy of remote classification is sufficient to justify the use of finer scale age-class structures in the future.

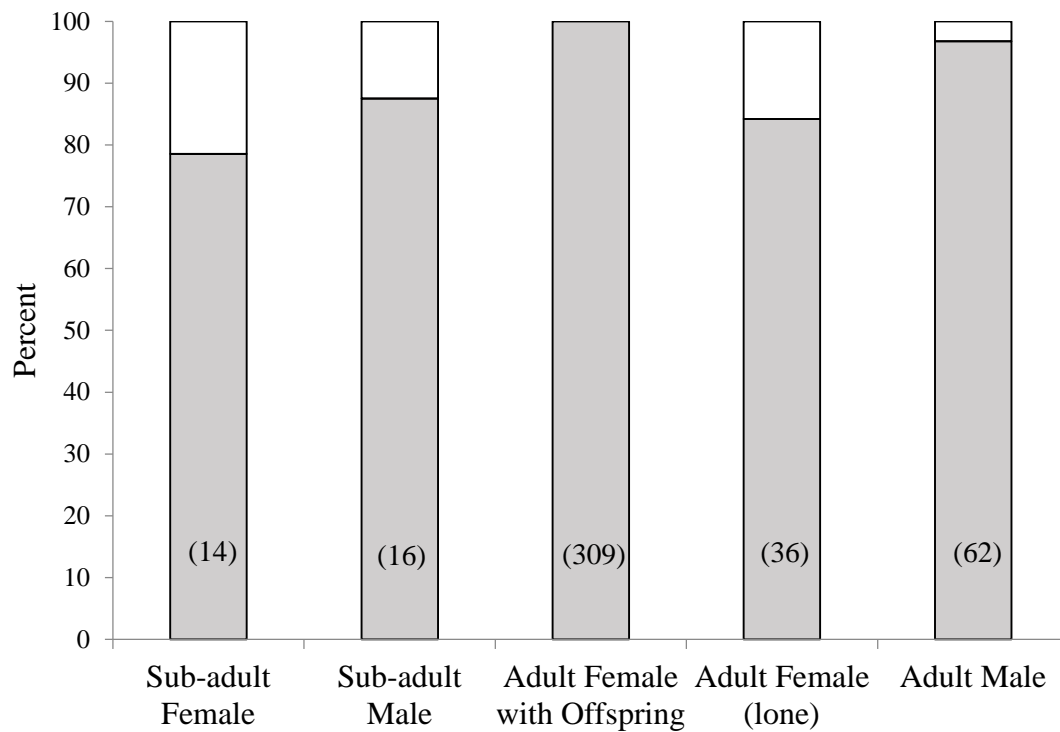
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**Figure B1.** Accuracy of estimating the age class of bears during genetic mark-recapture studies in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin (2011-2014). Data are for bears of known age-class and sex. Sex is based on genotyping and age class is based on one or more of the criteria listed in Table A1. Data are presented as percentages correctly (grey) and incorrectly (white) classified with sample sizes in parentheses.

**Table B1.** Lines of evidence (criteria) used to determine the ‘known’ sex and age class of polar bears.

<b>Sex-Age Class</b>	<b>Evidence Used to Determine Class</b>
Subadults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual previously encountered and / or captured as a COY or yearling.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior or future occasion. Age at capture determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior occasion. Age at capture determined by physical examination and the interval between capture and biopsy confirms the individual to be subadult.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to a bear subsequently harvested for which age was determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> </ul>
Adult Females with dependent offspring (COY or yearling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accompanied by dependent offspring at time of encounter or during previous encounter and / or capture.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual previously encountered and / or captured as a COY or yearling.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior or future occasion. Age at capture determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior occasion. Age at capture determined by physical examination and the interval between capture and biopsy confirms the individual to be adult.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to a bear subsequently harvested for which age was determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> </ul>
Lone Adult Females	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual previously encountered and / or captured as a COY or yearling.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior occasion or future occasion. Age at capture determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior occasion. Age at capture determined by physical examination and the interval between capture and biopsy confirms the individual to be adult.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an adult female previously accompanied by dependent offspring.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to a bear subsequently harvested for which age was determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> </ul>
Adult Males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual previously encountered and / or captured as a COY or yearling.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior occasion. Age at capture determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to an individual captured on a prior occasion. Age at capture determined by physical examination and the interval between capture and biopsy confirms the individual to be adult.</li> <li>• Genotype matched to a bear subsequently harvested for which age was determined by tooth<sup>1</sup>.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Age estimated by counting annular rings in an extracted vestigial premolar tooth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998).

**Table B2.** Comparison of sex and age classes as estimated from the air versus known sex and age for bears observed in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin, Canada, 2011-2014. Estimated sex and age based on aerial observation only (aerial survey scenario). Data are frequencies. Percentage of bears correctly classified are presented in parentheses.

			Known				
			Sub adult (<5yrs)		Adult		
			Female	Male	Female (with offspring)	Female (Lone)	Male
Estimated	Sub adult (<5yrs)	Female	3 (21.4)				
		Male	3	4 (25.0)			1
		Unknown/Not recorded	5	6			
	Sub adult or adult	Female				1	
		Male				2	1
		Unknown/Not recorded				1	
	Adult	Female (with offspring)			309 (100)		
		Female (Lone)	3	4		28 (73.7)	1
		Male		2		4	59 (95.2)
Total Individuals		14	16	309	36	62	

**Table B3.** Comparison of sex and age classes as estimated from the air versus known sex and age for bears observed in Baffin Bay and Kane Basin, Canada, 2011-2014. Estimated sex and age based on aerial observation and post-hoc correction for genetic sex (genetic mark-recapture scenario). Data are frequencies. Percentage of bears correctly classified are presented in parentheses.

			Known				
			Sub adult (<5yrs)		Adult		
			Female	Male	Female (with offspring)	Female (Lone)	Male
Estimated	Sub adult (<5yrs)	Female	11 (78.6)				
		Male		14 (87.5)			1
		Unknown/Not recorded					
	Sub adult or adult	Female				4	
		Male					1
		Unknown/Not recorded					
	Adult	Female (with offspring)			309 (100)		
		Female (Lone)	3			32 (88.9)	
		Male		2			60 (96.8)
Total Individuals			14	16	309	36	62

**APPENDIX C.** Regression results for an annual body condition metric for polar bears in Baffin Bay (BB). The metric, proportion of bears in good condition, was derived from observed frequencies of Fatness Index (FI) scores ranging from 1 to 5 (Stirling et al. 2008). Bears of FI 4 or 5 were in good condition. Spring ice transition was the decimal day (1-365) when ice cover over the continental shelf of BB reached 50%. Data for all years were collected within a standardized sampling area (see chapter 3). Regressions were performed in the Curve Estimation procedure of SPSS (Version 24.0).

<b>Sex-Age Class</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b><math>F_6</math></b>	<b><math>r^2</math></b>	<b><math>P</math></b>	<b><i>Curve Type</i></b>
Adult Male	Spring Ice Transition	59.89	0.97	<b>0.001</b>	Quadratic (2 <sup>nd</sup> order)
Adult Male	Year	18.90	0.79	<b>0.007</b>	Linear
Adult Female (alone)	Spring Ice Transition	0.25	0.05	0.635	Linear
Adult Female (alone)	Year	2.09	0.29	0.208	Linear
Adult Female (with offspring)	Spring Ice Transition	51.77	0.91	<b>0.001</b>	Exponential
Adult Female (with offspring)	Year	13.24	0.73	<b>0.015</b>	Exponential
Yearling	Spring Ice Transition	9.75	0.83	<b>0.029</b>	Quadratic (2 <sup>nd</sup> order)
Yearling	Year	4.71	0.49	0.082	Linear

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**APPENDIX D.** Description of the polar bear harvest management and monitoring systems in Canada and Greenland.

### **HARVEST MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING IN CANADA**

Within Canada, harvesting of polar bears has been managed on a quota system since 1967 (Lee and Taylor 1994). This system has undergone several revisions over time both in terms of the size of quotas and the methods of management. Since 1996, the quota system for BB, KB and other neighboring subpopulations managed by the Government of the Northwest Territories (and now the Government of Nunavut) has had several notable features. The term quota has been replaced by the term Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) to reflect language in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA). However, TAH and quota are often used interchangeably in reports. The TAH is managed on a flexible system that allows the annual level of harvest to vary somewhat from year-to-year to some degree. Each community hunting from a subpopulation is allocated a portion of the TAH. Exceedance of that allocation in a given year is compensated for by a reduction in the community's allowable harvest the following year. Exceedances occur when the total number of bears harvested is greater than the available limit or when too many females are harvested. This sex selective harvest management system is based on a target sex ratio of 2 or more males for every female harvested which allows a higher sustainable harvest than a 1:1 sex ratio (Taylor et al. 2008b). All human-caused mortalities are counted against the available TAH. Adult females with dependent offspring (cubs-of-the-year, yearling or two-year-olds) and those in or constructing dens are protected from hunting. The hunting season runs from July 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup> the following year. Most hunting is for subsistence purposes by Inuit. However, a portion of each community's TAH may be allocated to guided

sport hunting by non-Inuit, at the discretion of Inuit (Tyrell 2009; Wenzel 2008, 2011). Methods of hunting are regulated under the *Nunavut Wildlife Act*. With the exception of sport hunters who must travel by dog-team only, hunting may be facilitated by use of various forms of transportation including snow machine, All Terrain Vehicle or boat and with firearms of authorized calibers.

In Canada (Nunavut), the reporting of all harvested bears is mandatory. Hunters are required to provide evidence of the sex in the form of a baculum from harvested males. In the absence of a baculum, sex may be determined by DNA (Prior to 2005, proof of sex could also be established by sworn affidavit). When proof of sex is unavailable a harvested bear is counted as a female for quota management purposes. In addition to proof of sex, hunters are required to submit a set of standard specimens from each harvested bear including the lower jaw (or skull) for extraction of a tooth for aging, lip tattoos and ear tags if present. Payment is provided by the Government of Nunavut (GN) for these specimens.

Following harvest of a bear, hunters submit the required specimens and other information to local GN Conservation Officers. For each bear, details are recorded including location of harvest, date, hide length, estimated age, sex, type of hunt (e.g., regular subsistence, sport hunt, defense-of-life-and-property), ear tag number (and tags) if present and lip tattoo number (and tattoo) if present. The hide from each harvested bear is then marked with a uniquely numbered tag (hide seal) that is permanently affixed. This hide seal is required for export of hides from Nunavut and sale.

The information collected on each harvested bear is recorded on Hunter Kill Return (HKR) forms completed by Conservation Officers. HKR forms are submitted to the GN's polar bear management program where they were checked for omissions and errors before entry into



the GN's polar bear harvest database. The sex of harvested bears is again verified by submission of a baculum or by DNA submitted for analysis to Wildlife Genetics International (Nelson, BC, Canada). The age of harvested bears is determined from counts of annular rings in an extracted vestigial premolar tooth (Calvert and Ramsay 1998).

## **HARVEST MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING IN GREENLAND**

### Harvest management

Following the signing of the *Agreement on Conservation of Polar Bears* in 1973 (Anon. 1973), regulations for the harvest and the protection of polar bears for all areas of Greenland were introduced and were enforced by 1 January 1975 (Anon. 1976, Vibe 1985). Since then, several amendments have been made to the regulations (*cf.* Born 1995). The latest amendment was made in 2005 (Anon. 2005).

When Greenland Home Rule was established in 1979, Greenland took over the legal responsibility for management of its renewable resources, including polar bears. In October 2005, a new Executive Order (Anon. 2005) came into force. Some important protective measures in this executive order are (Anon. 2005, Lønstrup 2006, Hansen 2010):

- year round protection of all cubs (regardless of age) and females accompanied by cubs. The executive order also introduces a prohibition of the export of polar bear cubs;
- protection of all polar bears from 1 July to 31 August; in the local authority districts of Ittoqqortoormiit og Ammassalik from 1 August to 30 September;
- prohibition to disturb or dig out polar bears in dens;
- introduction of quotas from 1 January 2006 and the possibility that part of the quota may be used for trophy hunting. There has never been and currently is no trophy

hunting of polar bears in Greenland. Special provisions on trophy hunting will be laid down in a separate executive order;

- only Greenland residents who hunt as a full-time occupation are allowed to hunt polar bears;
- it is mandatory to report to the Greenland management authorities all catches including struck-and-lost polar bears;
- aircraft, helicopters, motorized vehicles, including snow scooters and boats larger than 20 GRT/15GT are not allowed in the hunt or for transportation to and from the hunting grounds;
- poison, traps, foot snares or self-shooting guns are not allowed;
- rim-fire rifles, shot guns or semi- or fully automatic weapons are not allowed. Polar bears may only be hunted using a rifle with a minimum caliber of 30.06 (7.62 mm);
- all meat, skin and other useable parts of the bear must be brought back (or cached in the field for later use); and,
- no parts of the polar bear must be sold until the catch has been officially registered and the license has received an official stamp.

The Melville Bay Nature Reserve offers protection of polar bears in the Baffin Bay subpopulation. This reserve (10 500 km<sup>2</sup>) was established in 1980 to protect important polar bear habitat. All hunting within the central (coastal) zone I of nature reserve is prohibited (Vibe 1985, Anon. 1989).

The Greenland Home Rule Act. No. 12 of 29 October 1999 provides the legal framework for wildlife management. Various laws on environmental protection and animal welfare also apply to the management of polar bears (Polar Bear Range States 2015).

Responsibility for the management of polar bears resides with the Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture, DFHA (Aalisarnermut, Piniarnermut Nunalerinermullu Naalakkersuisoqarfik, APNN) of the Greenland Government.

Quotas for the take of polar bears in Greenland were introduced in 2005 taking effect 1 January 2006 (Lønstrup 2006). The Minister of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture sets an annual polar bear quota. The minister drafts a preliminary regional allocation of the quota based on the latest scientific advice and harvest results for the preceeding harvest season, and then sends the draft to the Hunters' National Association, the municipalities, the Ministry of Nature and Environment and the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources for consultation for a period of not less than five weeks. Based on the resulting consultation, the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture prepares a final presentation of the total annual quota to the Minister (Polar Bear Range States 2015). Licenses to hunt polar bears are issues by the municipalities, within annual quotas set by DFHA and the National Government.

The Greenland Fisheries License Control Authority is tasked with enforcing the regulations set by the government and the municipalities (Polar Bear Range States 2015).

When polar bear studies conducted by the Greenland Fisheries Research Institute (predecessor of Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, Nuuk) were initiated in 1991, Greenland de facto took over the responsibility providing scientific data for the management of its polar bear subpopulations as outlined in the 1973 *Agreement on Conservation of Polar Bears*.

During the fall of 2000, the Greenland Home Rule Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Nunavut (Canada). An appendix to this MOU contains a prioritized list of items, including that there should be cooperation between both regarding shared polar bear subpopulations (Lønstrup 2006).

### Harvest Monitoring

Home Rule was established in Greenland 1979. Since then the Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture (DFHA, Nuuk) has been responsible for organizing the collection of catch statistics in Greenland and for summarizing and publishing the data. Until 1987 information about the number of polar bears taken in Greenland was available through the Hunters' Lists of Game (HLG) where hunters reported their catch of various wildlife including polar bears voluntarily. The HLG (Anon. 1954-83 and unpublished 1984-87) was based upon the principle that an appointed person from each settlement kept count of the catch of various hunting animals by all the hunters in his settlement and reported the numbers to the authorities (Rosing-Asvid 2002). When such reports for some reason were missing, the central authority added an estimate to account for unreported catch based upon "other information" (i.e., for example notices of catches in newspapers or records of trade of skin etc.). The HLG-summaries of the catch, including estimates of unreported catch, were published annually by the Ministry for Greenland in Copenhagen (until 1983). After the Greenland Home Rule Government took over the HLG-system, unpublished summaries of the catch in 1985, 1986 and 1987 became available from the Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture, DFHA (Nuuk). However, the reliability of the reporting in the HLG deteriorated since about the mid-1970s (Born 1995, Rosing 1998) and this way of monitoring the catch in Greenland stopped in 1987.

Some information (HLG and trade) was available during the decade prior to the introduction of a new system of reporting catches in 1993 (see the following). However, none of these sources gave the total picture and the size of the annual catch of polar bears from the BB and KB subpopulations in the 1980s and the information of annual catches was largely based on estimates (Born 1995). Born (1995) and Rosing-Asvid (2002) estimated that during 1980-1992 a

total of between 25(30) and 70(80) polar bears were taken each year by Greenlanders from the BB and KB subpopulations (the estimates of the total catch was not separated to BB and KB).

On January 1993 a new system of reporting catches – the "Piniarneq" (Greenlandic word for "catch") – was introduced in Greenland on 1 January 1996. The "Piniarneq" relies upon each hunter voluntarily reporting his annual catch (between 1 October and 30 September) of various species including polar bears. The Piniarneq system is linked to the issuing of hunting licenses, of which two categories exist: one for full-time hunters and another for part-time hunters.

Hunters in both categories have to pay a small fee for renewal of the license, at which time they are obliged to report their catches during the previous 12 months. Only full-time hunters can get a license to hunt polar bears. The information on catches is compiled by the Department of Fishery, Hunting and Agriculture (Nuuk) which publishes summaries of the annual catch by area. In the summaries, the catch is reported by municipality, meaning that in "Piniarneq" there are no records of the exact site of kill. There is also no information on sex and age of the caught bears or whether the bear(s) was (were) killed during a hunt involving more hunters than the one reporting the catch(es).

In recognition of the fact that a potential problem of reporting catches of polar bears via Piniarneq might be that more than one hunter reports the catch of a bear because several hunters participated in the hunt leading to multiple- reporting of a kill (see Discussion) it became mandatory from 1994 to report every kill of a polar bear on specific forms ("Special Reporting Forms"; "Særmeldingsskemaer"). On these forms the hunter's name, civil registration number, settlement/town, place and date of the kill, sex and approximate age (young, adult, old) of the bear ha to be given. To be able to reduce the problem of potential multi-reporting of a single kill the hunter who finished off the bear was supposed to fill in the form and also give the name etc.

of the other participants in the catch. During the years this system worked with variable success and not all bears that were caught were reported (Born 1998).

Quotas on polar hunting were first introduced in Greenland in 2006. After the introduction of quotas taking effect 1 January 2006 the Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture has improved the hunting statistics by developing a new database and a double reporting system. This means that a hunter must be issued a license before the hunt and immediately following the hunt the hunter must report the catch to the local authority using a standardized form. This standardized form includes information on the name of the hunter(s), place of residence, date, license number, location of kill, and the sex and age category, and whether the bear was marked. As an additional control, all hunters must report their annual harvest of all species (including polar bears) in Piniarneq (Hansen 2010).

In connection with studies of movement and subpopulation assessment more than 1500 polar bears have been physically marked in the Kane Basin and Baffin Bay subpopulations since the 1970s (Born 1995, Taylor et al. 2005, 2008, Peacock et al. 2012). Before the quotas the hunters received a token payment for returning marks (and transmitters) to the authorities with information on the bear (date, site, sex etc. etc). By the introduction of quotas it became mandatory to report whether a bear was marked or not and return tags (and transmitters) (Anon. 2005).

Since the 1980s biological samples from the polar bear catch (various tissues, sexual organs, teeth for ageing etc.) have been collected during various specific programs in connection with studies of pollution and the demography of the catch (e.g., Rosing-Asvid 2002, Sonne et al. 2012). However, these programs which relied upon the hunters collecting the samples with an

economical compensation served specific purposes and in case of monitoring the catch have been intermittent (Rosing-Asvid 2002).

In order to continuously monitor the Greenland catch of polar bears demographically and provide information on sex and age composition of the catch it became mandatory in 2012 for the polar bear hunters to deliver a tissue sample (for genetic analyses) and a small vestigial tooth (for age determination) from each bear killed. The samples shall be sent to the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources in Nuuk which is responsible for arranging the sampling program practically and for processing the samples. Each sample is accompanied by a filled form where with details about the catch (date, site, name of hunter, sex of the bear and its approximate age etc. etc.). The hunters are required to also send the same information to the Greenland management authorities (i.e., the Department of Fisheries Hunting and Agriculture in Nuuk).

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**APPENDIX E.** Results of binary logistic regressions for body condition scores (poor, fair-good) for polar bears in Kane Basin.

<b>Sex-Age Class</b>	<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b><i>B</i></b>	<b>Wald Statistic</b>	<b><i>P</i></b>
Adult male	Julian Day	-0.095	1.617	0.204
	Epoch <sub>(1990s-2010s)</sub>	0.230	0.082	0.774
Adult female (lone)	Julian Day	0.104	2.413	0.120
	Epoch <sub>(1990s-2010s)</sub>	0.775	1.152	0.283
Adult female (with COY)	Julian Day	0.251	9.210	<b>0.002</b>
	Epoch <sub>(1990s-2010s)</sub>	0.327	0.194	0.660
Adult female (with yearling)	Julian Day	0.082	0.617	0.432
	Epoch <sub>(1990s-2010s)</sub>	2.064	4.081	<b>0.043</b>
Subadult	Julian Day	0.111	0.741	0.389
	Epoch <sub>(1990s-2010s)</sub>	20.056	0.000	0.998