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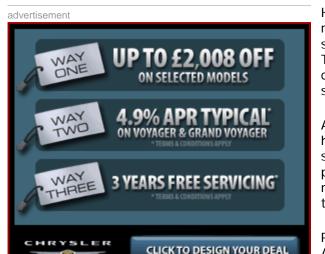


Sex threat to polar bears - Telegraph

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the team only looked at conditions that would cut mating success, rather than the overall impact on population growth.

However, his team warns that "a sudden and rapid reproductive collapse could occur if the sex ratio drops below a critical threshold. This threshold depends on local bear densities, and must therefore be evaluated separately for each population."

As a result, they believe that the current harvesting methods should err on the safe side. "Currently observed high litter production rates despite reduced male numbers should not be taken as evidence that populations are secure."

Prof Stephen Buckland of the University of St Andrews comments that this work does raise questions about the wisdom of the harvesting strategy in Canada.

He notes that the work "also has implications for polar bear populations threatened by climate change, where the combination of habitat loss and any significant harvest, however structured, may lead to rapid reductions in population sizes."

The polar bear is a vulnerable species at high risk of extinction, not least because predicted decreases in the polar sea ice due to global warming. Local long-term studies show that seven out of 19 subpopulations are declining or already severely reduced..

The new study focuses on a phenomenon called the Allee effect, in which individuals of many plant and animal species suffer reduced fitness at low population densities, which increases their extinction risk.

This has been seen at work in saiga antelopes, African wild dogs, African elephants and moose and is thought to have helped drive the passenger pigeon to extinction.

The team fears that the bear may see the same collapse as has been well documented with the saiga antelope: "Despite heavy sex-selective poaching and a continuing depletion of adult males, female fertilisation rates remained unaffected for a long time..but eventually collapsed in a sudden and nonlinear fashion when males were depleted below a critical threshold."

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