



Splash! A chunk of ice filled with fruit plopped into the pool. Alaska slept soundly.

“Alaska!” A zookeeper called her name. The polar bear kept napping.

Kerplunk! Another treat landed in the pool. This time, cold water splashed on Alaska’s nose. The bear jumped into the water after the goody.

Training a Deaf Polar Bear

Working with a Deaf Bear

Zookeepers at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore realized that their new polar bear, Alaska, could not hear. Zookeeper Tammy Chaney said, “Normally, a bear’s ears twitch when you call its name or make loud noises. Alaska didn’t budge.” Medical tests proved she was deaf.

Polar-bear cubs are **blind** and **deaf** when they are born.

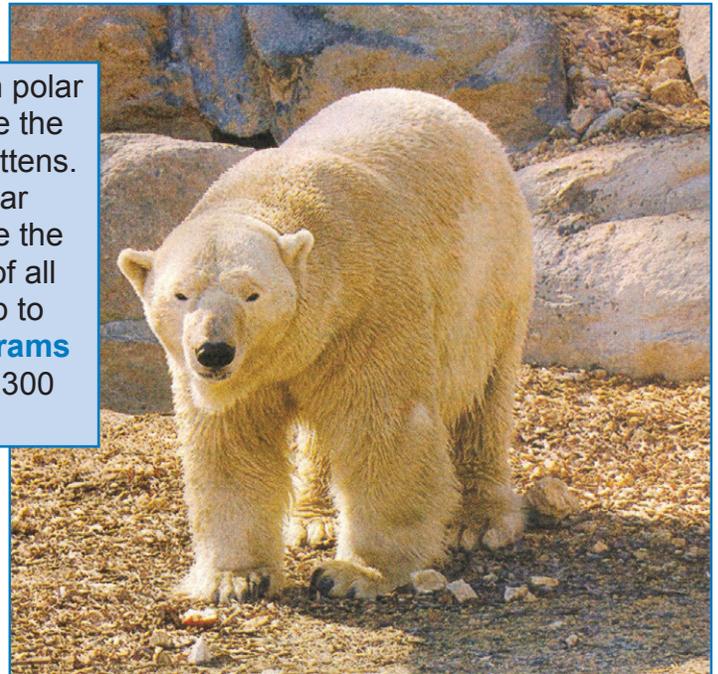
The zookeepers had never worked with a deaf polar bear. They wanted to teach her to hold out a paw if it was cut. They wanted her to open her mouth so they could check her teeth. They wanted her to climb on a weight board so she could be weighed.

Flashlight Game

Trainers often used a clicker to make a noise when an animal responds correctly. Because Alaska could not hear, the zookeepers tried a tiny flashlight. They held a toy ball on the end of a stick.

When Alaska touched the ball with her nose, the zookeepers flashed a light two times. They threw her a sardine as a reward. This game helped Alaska learn to work with the zookeepers. She could now learn to hold out her paw, open her mouth, and climb on a weight board.

Newborn polar bears are the size of kittens. Adult polar bears are the **largest** of all bears, up to **45 kilograms** (about 1,300 pounds).

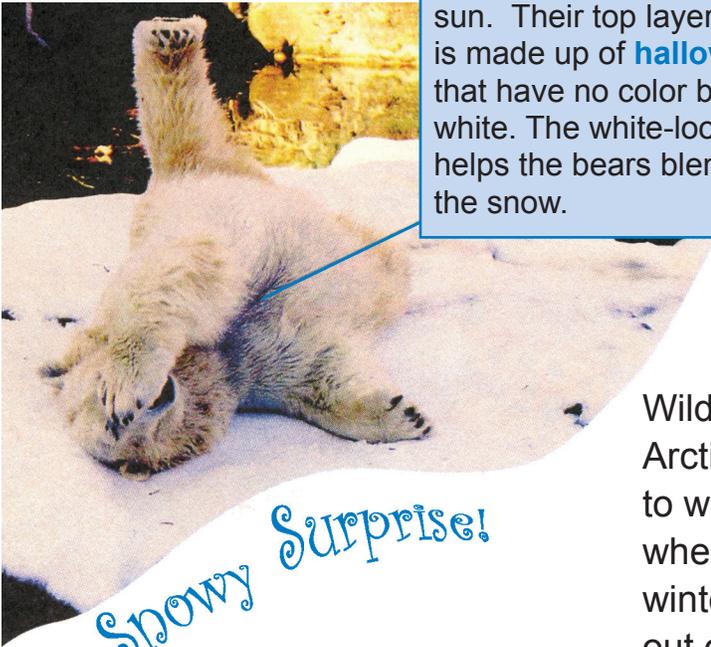


Alaska knows how to pay close attention to flashlight signals.

Training a Deaf Polar Bear

Alaska once lived in a circus with other polar bears. Zookeepers don't know if she was deaf since birth or became deaf during her years with the circus. But they think being deaf might have helped her. The loud circus noises didn't scare her. So she became a calm and curious bear.

Polar bears have **black skin**, which soaks up heat from the sun. Their top layer of fur is made up of **hallow hairs** that have no color but look white. The white-looking fur helps the bears blend into the snow.



Snowy Surprise!

Wild polar bears live on huge ice fields in the Arctic. With the circus, Alaska traveled only to warm places. Alaska got a frosty surprise when ten inches of snow fell during her first winter at The Maryland Zoo. "She looked out of the den door at this big white world," a zookeeper said. "She dropped on her belly and snowplowed around the exhibit. I think snow is her favorite thing in the world."

PLA Non-Fiction Sample

Flash! Splash! Training a Deaf Polar Bear

1. A newborn polar bear is the same size as a ...

- Puppy
- Cat
- Dog
- Kitten

2. How did zookeepers at The Maryland Zoo discover Alaska was deaf?

3. Trainers at the zoo usually use clickers that make noise to train animals. What did they use to train Alaska?

- Tiny flashlight
- Toy ball
- Laser light
- Salty sardines

4. Why do polar bears have black skin under their fur?

5. How did being deaf help Alaska?

6. Where do wild polar bears live?

7. Is *Flash! Splash! Training a Deaf Polar Bear* a good title for this article? Why or why not?
