

BUSINESS INSIDER

Russian scientists besieged by polar bears on a tiny Arctic island may not get help for 'about a month' — and that's not the worst part



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A handful of Russian researchers are said to be surrounded by 10 adult polar bears on a minuscule island in the middle of the Arctic Ocean — and help is set to arrive in "about a month," the [Russian news agency TASS reported](#).

The weather scientists are stationed on Troynoy, an island north of Siberia, where the adult bears and some of their cubs have reportedly been circling them for two weeks.

The researchers typically use flares and dogs to deter the bears, according to TASS, but their flare supplies have run out and one of their dogs has been killed by a bear.



Alex Berger

Vassiliy Shevchenko, who leads the state monitoring network in charge of the station, [told TASS on Tuesday](#) that a shipment of guard dogs and flares was on its way and would reach the station in "about a month."

"We have issued a recommendation for the station's personnel to use extreme caution, not to leave the station without a serious need, and continue only with possible meteorological observations," Shevchenko said.



Reuters/Mathieu Belanger

While it sounds alarming, this is hardly the first time something like this has happened. Last September, a team of Arctic Russian researchers [asked the government for help](#) after their weather station became surrounded by polar bears.

"At this time of year bears are landlocked waiting for the return of sea ice. They are very hungry as they haven't been able to hunt seals throughout the summer due to the seasonal loss of ice," [Lancaster University environmental chemist Crispin Halsall](#) told Business Insider.

But it's also the peak time for scientific research, since it's the [warmest and sunniest time of year](#).

"They'll happily stake out a science base on the off chance of food," added Halsall.

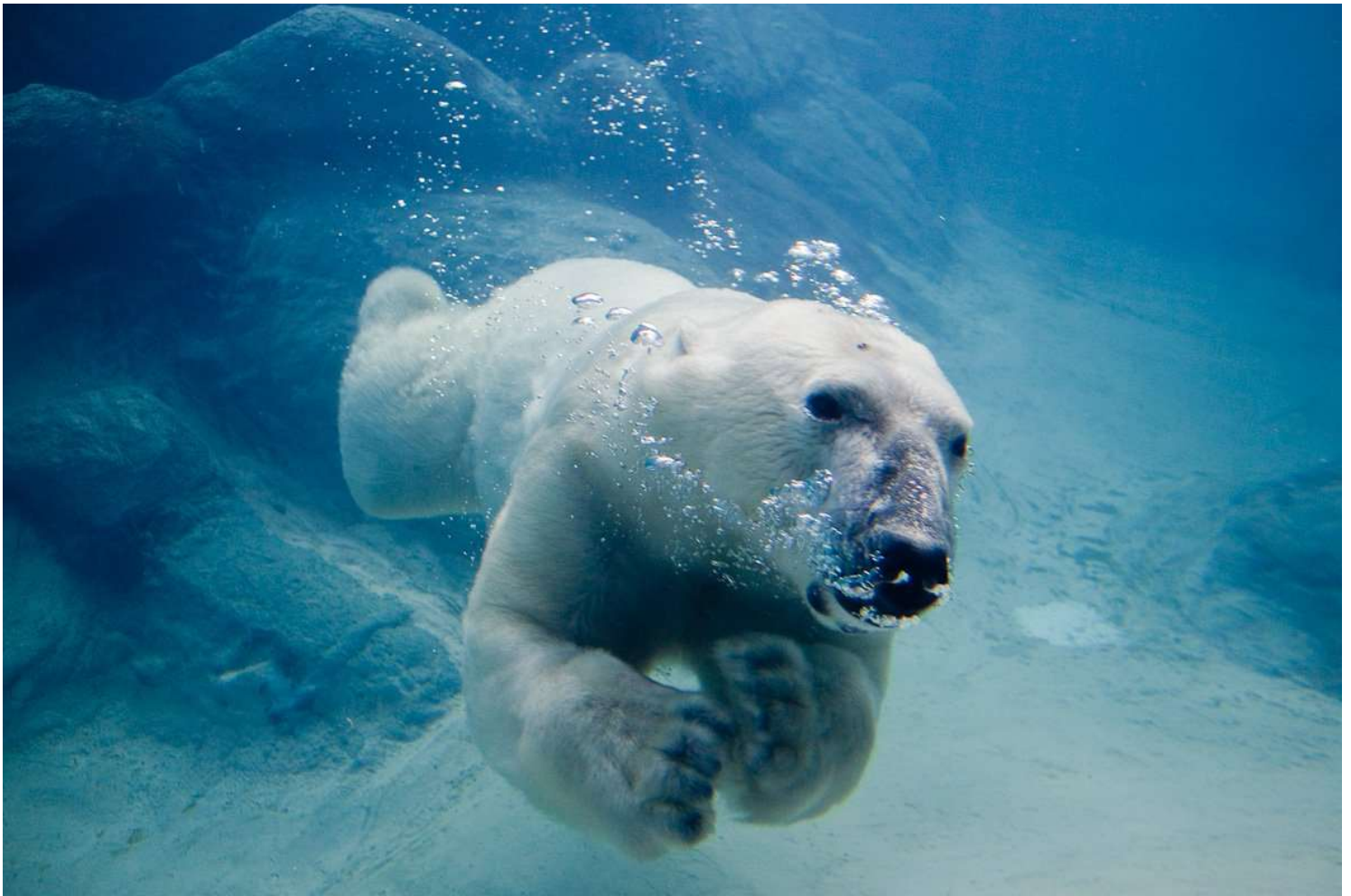


USGS

It doesn't help that the island on which the researchers are based is tiny. At its longest point, it measures just [27 kilometers](#), just 5 km longer than the island of Manhattan in New York.

Still, while the situation sounds grim for the scientists, it's perhaps equally bleak for the polar bears, whose species is listed on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's [Red List of Threatened Species](#) as "vulnerable," one category below "endangered."

According to the IUCN, the world's most thorough inventory of the conservation status of species, "Loss of Arctic sea ice due to climate change is the most serious threat to polar bears throughout their ... range."



Wikimedia Commons

The effects of global warming are [felt acutely in the Arctic](#). In the spring, the snow is melting faster. In the winter, it is taking longer to freeze. As a result, the bears — not entirely unlike the scientists awaiting aid — become trapped on land during the summer. Landlocked bears are at a far greater risk of starving to death because [seals, their main source of food](#), live in the ocean.

Shevchenko told TASS that polar bears had settled on Troynoy before and typically leave the island to look for food in October or early November, when the waters close to the shore begin the freeze.