



For Immediate Release

Out of Sight May Truly be Out of Mind for Two Polar Bears

Visual Barrier Reduces Stress for Papa and Baby Bear at Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat

Cochrane, Ontario – December 12, 2012: – Ever heard the old saying “children are to be seen, but not heard”? Well, as far as “baby bear” Ganuk goes – the saying should likely be changed to “fathers should be smelled, but not seen.”

Since Inukshuk’s arrival at the Polar Bear Habitat October 1st, 2012, Zookeepers and staff had noticed Ganuk, Inukshuk’s son, had been showing signs of stereotypic behaviours.

Although Inukshuk to all appearances could care less about the nearly 700 lb bear on the other side of the fence, to Ganuk – an 1,100 lb, fully adult male was, let’s just say, probably a little intimidating.

The answer? A 135’ fabric visual barrier installed between Enclosures 1 and 2, limiting the bear’s visual contact with each other.

“It was truly a group and town effort to come up with the solution,” said Polar Bear Habitat Manager, Karen Cummings. “The original idea to create a visual barrier was the zookeepers’; the town’s new maintenance person, Roger Robin, came up with the first installation idea; rigging was thought up by staff member Reg Gendreau; the fabric came from Dan Maltais of the town’s Operation’s Department and local aviator cover fabricators, Sheney and Company made and helped install the barrier.”

The barrier has been up for over a week now, and the Habitat is proud to report both of the bears look a lot happier. “Inukshuk is happier because his favourite Enclosure is 2 with the pool, and Ganuk seems to be much happier – even though we know he must still smell Inukshuk, maybe he thinks out of sight is out of mind,” said Cummings.

Although the Habitat is careful to caution the barrier may not be the answer forever and that there may be more behavioural issues to deal with in the future as the bears age, since every polar bear is different and keeping them stimulated is an on-going battle, they are extremely happy the barrier made a difference.

“A certain amount of pacing and stereotypical behaviours are always to be expected in captive environments – as polar bears may distance up to 50 kilometres a day in the wild, so sometimes just want to “travel” within their own enclosures, but for now anyway, the bears seem to be enjoying themselves. We know the best place for polar bears is in the wild, but our bears have been raised in captivity and could not survive in the wild. Our job is to make their lives as happy as they can possibly be,” said Zookeepers.



Cummings admitted installing the barrier was a risk. “In all honesty, there was no guarantee the barrier would work – but if we didn’t try, we’d never know.”

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Wonderfully Unexpected!