

Comprehension 8

Killer Whales

Most people see killer whales as powerful predators, but they are actually victims of an increasingly polluted habitat. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) last month announced that Norwegian killer whales are the most toxic mammals in the Arctic.

Previous research awarded the dubious honour to the polar bear, but a new study shows that killer whales have even higher levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides and a flame retardant. The results are based on blubber samples taken from killer whales in Tysfjord, a fjord (glacial sea inlet) in arctic Norway.

The research was carried out by the Norwegian Polar Institute and partly funded by the Norwegian Research Council. “Killer whales can be regarded as indicators of the health of our marine environment,” said Hans Wolkers, a researcher at the NPI. “The high levels of contaminants are alarming. They clearly show that the arctic seas are not as clean as they should be, which, in particular, affects animals at the top of the food chain.”

WWF has funded Dr. Wolkers to carry out new research to further monitor the levels of dangerous contaminants in killer whales, including another flame retardant called deca-BDE, used in electronic goods and coatings for household products such as carpets. The findings of this research are expected to be available next year.

Killer whales are particularly vulnerable to contaminants because they feed at the top of the food chain and accumulate chemicals from the species they prey on. These contaminants accumulate in their blubber and other fat-rich tissues. Killer whales can live up to 40 years so they can have very high pollution levels in their tissues. Many pollutants found in Arctic killer whales were not produced or even used in the region.

Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What does the writer say that killer whales are victims of?

2. Which animal has recently been given the title of “the most toxic mammal in the Arctic”?

3. Which animal had previously held this title?

4. In which country was research on killer whales carried out?

5. Who conducted this research and who financed this research?

6. Which organisation has asked Hans Wolkers to conduct some new research?



7. When will we know the results of the new research which is to be carried out by Dr. Wolkers?

8. Why were killer whales found to be so toxic?

9. In what parts of the killer whale do the contaminants accumulate?

10. According to the passage, what is the maximum life span of a killer whale?

Find ONE word in the passage which has a similar meaning to each of the following.

1. An animal which kills and eats other animals. _____
2. The area of the world around the North Pole. _____
3. Causing worry and fear, shocking. _____
4. Warm-blooded animals which feed their young on milk. _____
5. Weak and easily hurt _____