

Enter the 'grolar bear': Warming habitats means chances for inter-species mating

In the last 40 years, the Arctic has warmed by about 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit, more than twice the overall global rise in that same period. Already grizzly bears are tromping into polar bear territory while fish like cod and salmon are leaving their historic haunts to follow warming waters north. One tangible result of the migration, scientists report, is that animals will learn to live with new neighbors. But polar biologists worry that animals could get a little too friendly with each other. With less ice clogging Arctic seas, whales are ranging farther; meanwhile, animals like seals that breed on the ice have fewer places to go. In both cases, the chances of encountering a different species jump. "All of a sudden, hybridization will skyrocket," says Brendan Kelly, a polar ecologist at the National Science Foundation.

The first confirmed cross between a polar bear and a grizzly bear—a white bear with brown patches—was documented in 2006; genetic analysis of a second, found in 2010, revealed that its mother was also a hybrid, suggesting that more instances are happening under scientists' radar. In 2009, a biologist at the National Marine Mammal Laboratory photographed a probable bowhead/right whale hybrid in the Bering Sea. More hybrids are possible.

Read the full, original story: [A Strange New Gene Pool of Animals Is Brewing in the Arctic](#)