

Illegal Polar Bear Trade Booming

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Moscow is at the center of a small but booming illegal trade in polar bear body parts, new research says.

The average asking price for a polar bear skin hit 600,000 rubles (\$19,600) during the 20-month study, the highest since monitoring of the trade began in 2003.

The poaching of polar bears and the sale of their hides over the Internet has not fallen, but prices are up, indicating increasing demand.

The asking price for a polar bear head, which is cheaper than an entire hide, hit 130,000 rubles, more than the average for a whole skin in 2003, according to the research by the World Wildlife Fund and Bear Patrol.

In the study, researchers found 29 online advertisements for skins and three for polar bear paws, offering a total of 49 skins. Fourteen of the ads were offering the products in Moscow. Other cities included St. Petersburg, Chelyabinsk, Murmansk, Kirov and Irkutsk.

While the number of people attempting to sell bear parts has remained more or less stable, more sellers are now offering multiple skins.

There are thought to be between 5,000 and 7,000 polar bears in the Russian Arctic. Polar bears are a protected species in Russia, which outlawed hunting of the animals in 1957.

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