

BIG BEARS and LITTLE BEARS

MEET Snowball, Auckland's bachelor polar bear. But don't take too much notice of this pose; Snowball's not so modest always—at that particular moment coyness seemed to be a good way of encouraging brown bread to hurtle through the air. When bread doesn't hurtle and paper bags are not anywhere to be seen or heard Snowball will quite likely refuse to pose for you; he'll swim about and turn turtle with great deliberation, or sludge up and down his white walk the other side of the water, or spend a very long time tearing to pieces one hunk of fish which he has brought up from some secret hiding place below water.

That's the summer picture: in the winter it's quite a different story. In London, at the first fall of snow, the polar bears sit up and clap their paws and in their lumbering fashion dance for joy. And in Auckland in the winter the polar bear becomes a more jolly and lively fellow than he is in the summer. You would say, perhaps, that he laughs; and if anyone said you exaggerated, you could point out that at any rate he raises his head and opens his mouth and wears in general a bright and cheerful look.

In the world of books he is known as *Thalassarcus maritimus*, the largest of the bear family (Ursidae), with the exception of the grizzly bear. Sometimes he is nine feet long, and always he is a very good swimmer and diver—that is, of course, for simple straight-forward diving, none of your fancy double somersaults. And observers who have seen him in the not so sunny south say that he can lollap along at a fair pace in a rolling gallop. A cunning device to help him along on the ice is the thick growth of bristles on the soles of his feet. Winter time is cub-time, the female bringing forth her litter in a cavern in the snow.

His Wife is in Australia

Snowball is a bachelor, but not by choice. By a lucky chance he was able to be shipped from Australia last year; but so far the authorities have been unable to find space for the wife who is ordered for him. To judge from the story of the polar bears at the Wellington Zoo—where murder was committed on one of the two she-bears too generously provided for one male—the polar bear is a monogamous fellow. But please do not take this as final: my scientific training has taught me not to accept one set of evidence as conclusive proof—especially in a matter of this kind.

Polar bear cubs have never been raised at Auckland. But Snowball's predecessor was born and reared in the Sydney Zoo; he himself, however, is a genuine native of the deep, deep, south.



A bachelor—for the duration

If you ask him how he likes New Zealand, he looks at the sky and gives a morose sniff. (No, not even one word about our coffee).

Yes, They Laugh!

If Snowball won't play, the best thing to do is to go on up the hill to meet the jolliest little people in the zoo—the honey bears. And if anyone argues when you say you saw them laughing, I advise you to mutter "agnostic" and pass on. Anyway, I saw them laughing! First they had a wrestling match, which ended with honours to this one or that one. I don't know which; and then they sat on the ground and looked into the air. Sniff! No honey. One kept on looking for it—under a stone and behind a stone and under where the stone was now—while the other caught his hind toes with his front paws (they might be hands), and rocked backwards and forwards on his backside until he toppled over laughing.

Well, I wasn't in the least surprised to hear that a visitor from England fell so much in love with the honey bears in the Auckland Zoo that she left them a legacy to be spent on honey for an extra weekly treat for them. Unfortunately, they can't have even their normal supply of honey just now; so like Snowball they are anxiously waiting for the war to be over: Snowball to get a wife and the little bears to get their regular honey and their legacy honey.

—J.

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