

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Source: Journal of Wildlife Diseases, 36(2) : 409

Published By: Wildlife Disease Association

URL: <https://doi.org/10.7589/0090-3558-36.2.409>

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR . . .

I am writing to inform you of a factual error reported in the article by Cattet et al. (1999, *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*, 35(3), pp. 548–556). In an example presented on p. 548, I incorrectly stated that “13 (or 2.6%) of approximately 500 polar bears handled in western Hudson Bay” died during a 3 yr duration. The correct frequency was, in fact, 13 (or 1.3%) of approximately 1,000 polar bears. Although this mistake does not affect the results or conclusions of the report, I am concerned it may convey an erroneous message that handling-induced mortality occurs at similar rates in all studies of polar bears. This is not the case and I want to stress that even the corrected frequency I’ve cited can be considered only in a very narrow context, while bearing in mind the following points. First, most polar bears handled on a yearly basis in Canada are captured in association with mark-recapture studies. Observed mortality rates in these studies are very low. For example, only two of 2,226 polar bears

captured for mark-recapture by the Canadian Wildlife Service in the western Hudson Bay population from 1989 to 1997 died during handling; a mortality rate of 0.09%. Second, all 13 deaths that I’ve cited occurred only in association with two programs in which polar bears were handled in quite different ways from the more frequent mark-recapture studies. For example, some deaths occurred during helicopter translocation, an activity used primarily for wildlife management purposes, whereas some of the research-related deaths occurred while investigating new immobilizing drugs. Thus, it should be very clear that both the incorrect and corrected frequencies are likely to be much greater than the overall rate of mortality that occurs in the broader context of polar bear management and research.

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