

Yahoo! My Yahoo! Mail More

Make Y! My Homepage

New User? Sign Up Sign In Help

YAHOO! NEWS

Search

WEB SEARCH

HOME U.S. BUSINESS WORLD ENTERTAINMENT SPORTS TECH POLITICS SCIENCE HEALTH TRAVEL MOST POPULAR

Science Video Weather News Space &amp; Astronomy Animals &amp; Pets Dinosaurs &amp; Fossils Biotech Energy Environment

## While U.S. in Big Chill, Arctic Runs Fever

Andrea Thompson  
Senior Writer  
LiveScience.com - 59 mins ago

Send Share Print

While parts of North America have been in the icy grips of an unusually cold and snowy winter recently, the Arctic has been downright balmy compared to past winters.

These warmer-than-normal temperatures mean that the sea ice in [the Arctic](#) is looking pretty anemic, despite the winter season.

Arctic ice goes through a normal cycle of summer thaw and winter re-freeze. In recent decades, however, sea ice has become overall less extensive and thinner, leading to forecasts that in future decades the polar region will be [ice-free during summer](#). The trend looks to be continuing this winter, scientists now say.

### Warmer Arctic

Climate swings in any single season are part of Nature, of course. That's why records - warm or cold, wet or dry - get broken. For much of the United States, this [winter](#) has been an exceptionally chilly one.

The average temperature for the United States in December, 32.5 F, was almost 1 degree Fahrenheit below the average for the 20th century, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Much of the West and Midwest had a particularly frigid month, with temperatures plunging several degrees below average.

This winter in the Arctic has been a completely different story.

"It's warm everywhere in the Arctic. It's anomalously warm," said Julienne Stroeve, of the National Snow & Ice Data Center (NSIDC) in Boulder, Colo.

Both December and January have been abnormally warm months, which impacts the cyclical re-freezing of sea ice over the years, because these are "two crucial ice-growing months," Stroeve told LiveScience.

### Thinner ice, more melt

Arctic sea ice hasn't been reaching its former thicknesses and extents in recent years, especially after the dramatic meltdown observed in the summer of 2007, which opened up the [fabled Northwest Passage](#). (This past summer saw the [second lowest](#) summer ice area on record.)

That record melting - which left 30 percent less ice in the Arctic than there was at the previous record low - caused the loss of substantial amounts of older ice, which is thicker and generally survives the summer. Older, thicker ice is typically 6.5 to 10 feet (2 to 3 meters) thick, while younger ice is closer to 3 feet (1 meter) in thickness.

Melting exposes more areas of open ocean, which absorbs incoming sunlight that the ice would normally reflect, so there is the potential for a snowball effect, or what scientists call self-reinforcing or feedback. Come winter, the ice that refreezes is thinner, first-year ice, which is more susceptible to melt in the summer, potentially exposing even more open ocean.

"That [thinner ice] typically can all melt out in the summer," Stroeve said.

### This year, the future

That [feedback](#) seems to be kicking in, as now "the Arctic is just more dominated by that thinner ice," Stroeve said, adding that unless February and March are much colder than normal, this winter's ice could end up covering less area than normal and be thinner than even in recent years.

So far, this winter has been warmer than last, Stroeve said, and some odd weather patterns cropped up in

 News Search  
All News Advanced

### Top Stories

Obama warns of need for stimulus bill right away  
Ginsburg is hospitalized with pancreatic cancer  
Pilot told controllers he was going into river  
Iraqi prime minister is big winner in vote  
Obama creates faith-based office with wide mission  
Somali pirates make off with \$3.2 million ransom  
Israel ambassador is latest shoe-throwing target

[More Top Stories »](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

**US Average Credit Score is 680**  
How do you compare?  
See your score in seconds

EXCELLENT 700+

GOOD 600-700

POOR 300-600

FIND OUT FREE [CreditReportAmerica.com](#)  
Know Your Score, Protect Your Future

### sponsored links

#### Parts for Arctic Spas

Pumps, packs, heaters, controls, ozonators for Arctic hot tubs.  
[www.SpaGuts.com](#)

#### Polar Region

Retailer of Antarctica and south pole maps, videos, books, gifts, clothing and more, as well as a source for news, weather and information from the frozen continent.  
[www.antarcticconnection.com](#)

#### Beautiful Ice Luminaries

Just add water to make these beautiful Luminaries for the holidays.  
[arcticicelantern.com](#)

### Featured



#### Facing forward

Indigenous people march against capitalism in The Week in Photos on Yahoo! News.



#### Were you there?

Send us your inauguration photos. You might be featured on You Witness News.

both December and January that brought ice growth to a standstill. Pauses in the regrowth of ice aren't a new phenomenon - they have happened before, even in much colder winters - but they only exacerbate the current situation in the Arctic by adding yet another mechanism that stagnates ice growth.

In January, these weather patterns created different conditions in different parts of the Arctic. While ice grew southwest of Greenland, it retreated in areas east of Greenland and in parts of the Barents Sea, the NSIDC reported.

While ice is still re-freezing, ice coverage area at the end of January was still 293,000 square miles (760,000 square kilometers) less than the 1979-2000 average, according to the NSIDC. This didn't break the record low for January ice area (set in 2006), but it put January 2009 in the top six. Including this year, January ice area is declining by about 3 percent per decade, the NSIDC reported.

Looking further into the future, unless there are several very cold winters and mild summers, Arctic sea ice is unlikely to bounce back in the coming decades.

"The idea of recovery right now seems pretty slim," Stroeve said. "You just don't get very cold temperatures like you used to."

Eventually, the sea ice is expected to melt out entirely in the summer, leaving only a cover of winter seasonal ice. The NSIDC predicts that this will happen around 2030, though Stroeve says it could happen earlier, as indeed some other scientists predict. That it will happen seems fairly certain: "There's no doubt in my mind about that," Stroeve said.

- [Video - Melting Sea Ice Seen From Orbit](#)
- [Quiz: Global Weather Extremes](#)
- [Arctic News and Information](#)

Original Story: [While U.S. in Big Chill, Arctic Runs Fever](#)

LiveScience.com chronicles the daily advances and innovations made in science and technology. We take on the misconceptions that often pop up around scientific discoveries and deliver short, provocative explanations with a certain wit and style. Check out our science [videos](#), [Trivia & Quizzes](#) and [Top 10s](#). [Join our community](#) to debate hot-button issues like stem cells, climate change and evolution. You can also sign up for free [newsletters](#), register for [RSS feeds](#) and get cool gadgets at the [LiveScience Store](#).

Related Searches: [greenland](#) [polar region](#) [barents sea](#) [livescience](#)

[Send](#) | [Share](#) | [Print](#)

### More...

- Science Video: [High-Powered Camera Phone](#) ABC News
- Science Video: [Largest snake 'as long as a bus'](#) BBC
- Science Video: [Ancient fossil find: This snake could eat a cow!](#) AP

### Most Viewed - Science

- Everyone Agrees: [Women Are Hard to Read](#) LiveScience.com
- Ancient fossil find: [This snake could eat a cow!](#) AP
- 1st deep sea observatory looks at [climate change](#) AP
- La Nina seen gradually weakening in 2009: [NOAA](#) Reuters
- Divorce Makes Women Look Older LiveScience.com

[All Most Viewed](#)

### Most Blogged - Science

- The video game that may help [with fire rescues](#) BBC News | Science/Nature | UK Edition - Wed Feb 4, 1:33 am EDT [Blogs About This Story \(7\)](#)
- Bill Gates releases mosquitoes [into audience](#) MSNBC.com - Wed Feb 4, 5:53 pm EDT [Blogs About This Story \(6\)](#)
- Fossil remains of snake 'as long as a bus' found in [South America](#) BBC News | News Front Page | UK Edition - Wed Feb 4, 9:06 am EDT [Blogs About This Story \(6\)](#)

### Elsewhere on the Web

- Time.com: [Exposing the Myth of Clean Coal Power](#)
- Time.com: [First Rule of the Ant Colony: No Hanky Panky](#)
- ABC News: [Common Chemicals Linked to Infertility](#)

### Updates

My Connections [Everyone](#)

[Sign In](#)  
to see what your Connections are up to on Yahoo! News.  
New User? [Sign Up](#)

### Education

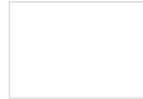


[Low Stress Jobs](#)  
Get inspired by careers that offer the most low stress and satisfying jobs.



[Paid \\$100,000 To Do What?](#)  
Check out these surprising six-figure salaries across some unexpected industries.

### Science Video



[High-Powered Camera Phone](#) ABC News



[Largest snake 'as long as a bus'](#) BBC



[Ancient fossil find: This snake could eat a cow!](#) AP



[New U.S. car maker pushes luxury karma](#) AP

[More Science Video »](#)

### Autos

#### New Cars Prices, review, pictures

All Makes

All Models

[Shop all new cars](#)

#### Used Cars Prices, review, pictures

All Makes

All Models

Listings provided by Cars.com

[More from Yahoo! Autos »](#)

More News

Personalize: [Add/Remove News Categories](#) | [Change Layout](#)

Science

Sources: [AP](#) [Reuters](#) [AFP](#) [SPACE.com](#) [LiveScience.com](#) [McClatchy Newspapers](#) [NPR](#)

Bones bring colonial times back to life

31 mins ago

[Ancient fossil find: This snake could eat a cow!](#) Wed Feb 4, 9:08 pm ET

[1st deep sea observatory looks at climate change](#) Wed Feb 4, 3:47 pm ET

[Scientist says dam may have triggered China quake](#) Wed Feb 4, 2:46 pm ET

[Endangered Catalina Island fox population booms](#) Wed Feb 4, 10:10 am ET

[More from AP](#) | [All Science](#)

Top Stories

Most Popular

Local

[Change Location](#)

World

U.S. News

Politics

Business

Technology

Health

Entertainment

Travel

Sports

Odd News

Opinion

Subscribe

Add headlines to your personalized My Yahoo! page ([About My Yahoo!](#) and [RSS](#))

Science - LiveScience.com

[Add to My Yahoo!](#) | [RSS](#)

[More News Feeds »](#)

[All Comics »](#)

Alerts

Get an alert when there are new stories about:

- Greenland
- polar region
- Barents Sea
- LiveScience

[Add Selected Alerts](#)

[View More Alerts](#)

Daily Features

Opinions & Editorials: Diverse views on news from the right, left, and center.

[All Opinion »](#)



Photo Highlight

[Photo Highlight Slideshow](#)  
Eight-month old lion Simba bares his teeth at a zoo in Bulgaria. AP  
Photo/Petar Petrov

[More Photos and Slideshow »](#)

Also on Yahoo! News

- [Today in History](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [News by Region \(Yahoo! Directory\)](#)
- [Yahoo! News & Media Sites](#)

[NEWS SERVICES](#)   [RSS](#)   [News Alerts](#)   [Weather Alerts](#)   [Add Yahoo! Headlines to Your Site](#)   [Site Map](#)   [Help](#)   [Feedback](#)

Copyright © 2009 Yahoo! Inc. All rights reserved.   [Questions or Comments](#)   [Privacy Policy](#)   [Terms of Service](#)   [Copyright/IP Policy](#)