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Rare bear: Nima Sarikhani spent three days searching in fog for a bear to photograph.

Is it a sign? This picture has won a top photography prize — and captured the hearts of people all over the world.

What's happening?

Bright blue jellyfish in Norway. A flock of starlings making the shape of a bird over Rome. A pair of lions in **Kenya** licking their cub. These are three of the stunning photos from the 2024 Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition.

But there could be no doubt about the winner in the People's Choice category. It was Nima Sarikhani's picture of a polar bear sleeping on a small iceberg.

Find out more

The head of the **Natural History Museum** said the photo shows us the beauty and **fragility** of our planet.

But there is more to it than that. The photo has a mysterious power which makes you keep looking at it. Here are five **theories** about why the picture moves us so deeply.

Animal symbol For the Tsimshian people of Canada, the white "spirit bear" is a symbol of the link between our world and places of peace and love.

Spiritual rituals Shamans see polar bears as guardians in animal form which appear when we need them.

Inuits' knowledge For Eskimo and **Inuit** people, the polar bear represents **ancient** knowledge.

Paw positivity According to one **dream interpreter**, a polar bear is a positive sign that you have a clear vision of a challenge in your real life.

Recurring creature In the 1980s an **experiment** proved that if you try not to think about a polar bear, you will always think of one.

Is it a sign?

Some say

Yes! Of course it is. The polar bear, which is struggling to survive due to **climate change**, is dreaming of a better world. We must dream of a better world too.

Others think

No! It is a beautiful photo — but it is just a picture. Humans always want to look for meaning in things, but sometimes we have to understand when there is no extra meaning to be found.

Some people say

“Photography is the only language that can be understood anywhere in the world.”

Bruno Barbey (1941 – 2020), French photographer

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain from this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

2. Construct

What is your point of view? - You are shown a white bear and told it has special powers. Think about what you would say.

3. Reflect

What might happen next? - You are asked to take part in an animal painting contest. Paint a picture for it.

Glossary

Kenya - A country in East Africa with a population of nearly 54 million people.

Natural History Museum - A big museum in London which displays evidence of life in the past, such as dinosaurs.

Fragility - When something is easily broken.

Theories - Ideas that you still need to prove are true.

Shamans - People who are said to have special powers to interact with good and evil spirits.

Inuit - Groups of indigenous peoples living in the Arctic and subarctic regions.

Ancient - Very old.

Dream interpreter - Somebody who looks for meaning in dreams.

Experiment - A controlled test to see if an idea is true.

Climate change - Long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Human action is a major cause of climate change.