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June 22, 2007

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BEARING UP IN THE HEAT

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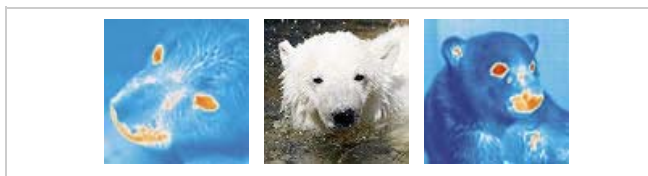
Knut Keeps Cool, Naturally

New infrared images reveal that Knut is staying cool in the heat -- much to the relief of fans who worried the little furball might be overheating. Meanwhile his keeper Thomas Dörflein has been nominated for a medal for his services to Germany.

Despite recent high temperatures in Berlin, celebrity polar bear cub Knut isn't suffering from the heat. Even with temperatures reaching tropical highs of up to 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit), Berlin Zoo researcher Rudolf Reinhard told SPIEGEL ONLINE that Knut doesn't need help cooling off.

"He can go for a swim any time he likes," Reinhard says. "He's always at liberty to do so."

PHOTO GALLERY: KNUT KEEPS COOL IN THE SUMMER HEAT



Click on a picture to launch the image gallery (12 Photos)

His swimming pool isn't chilled, and his cage isn't air-conditioned, Reinhard says. But could the heat be unhealthy for Knut, whose natural habitat is the sea ice of the polar north?

"Absolutely not," says Reinhard. "It's pretty warm in Canada right now as well, so this isn't too abnormal."

While northern Canada's summer temperatures certainly don't reach recent Berlin highs, Knut seems to be coping well. Reinhard says that polar bears regulate their body heat like dogs, sweating through their nose and mouth.

And new **infrared photos** of Knut indicate that this is working just fine. Even in the stifling heat, his body surface is only 32 degrees Celsius (90 degrees Fahrenheit). Meanwhile his sweat gland areas around his nose, mouth, eyes and ears, are working hard to regulate his temperature -- those areas measure in at a sweltering 37.5 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit).

The infrared photographer, building physicist Thomas Zimmerman, was allowed to snap shots of the little bear because he's researching how baby animals regulate their body heat. Zimmerman told the

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tabloid *Bild* that Knut is "well insulated," and that the same polar bear insulation that retains heat in the winter works to insulate against it in the summer.

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A Medal For Dörflein?

Meanwhile on Friday *Bild* -- ever attentive on the Knut beat -- reported that fans of Knut's keeper Thomas Dörflein have started an [online petition](#) for him to receive the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany -- the highest tribute German citizens can receive for services to the nation.

The fans are encouraging Federal President Horst Köhler to give Dörflein -- who has acquired quite a following of his own since becoming the bear's surrogate father -- the award. They have even contacted Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit -- [a self-confessed Knut fan](#) -- to add his endorsement. Wowereit's response was noncommittal, though -- his office said they preferred not to comment on who might get the medals.

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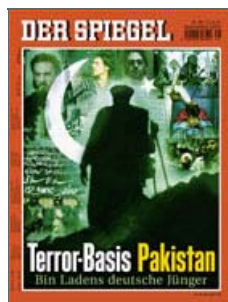
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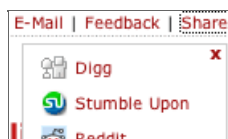
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