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The arctic ice cap: 'Less and less ice'

Satellite imagery has shown that the Arctic ice cap is thinning and is nearly 30 percent smaller than it was 25 years ago. In the winter of 2004-05, the Arctic's perennial ice, which usually survives the summer, shrank by 280,000 square miles -- the size of Turkey.

In August, a crack opened in the ice pack from the Russian Arctic to the North Pole, an event never seen before. Arctic ice reflects sunlight, and its absence could accelerate global warming. Whole species seem destined to disappear while others move northward in their place. "People tend to think there's not much life in the Arctic. But it's an incredibly diverse ecosystem," said Gary Stern, the chief scientist on the Canadian icebreaker Amundsen.

Estimates vary on when the passage will be open to shipping all summer because of the warming. The Canadian Ice Service conservatively predicts the southerly drift of even a shrunken ice pack will keep the passage clogged for most of this century. Other experts predict it will be open as soon as 2020. Marie Emmanuelle Rail, 30, a researcher who has been working in the Arctic for five years, said, "You can see it. You come every year and you see less and less ice." WASHINGTON POST

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