



Seasonal cycle of sea ice extents in the Arctic for the year 2004 (in red) and for the average of the 25 years 1979–2003 (in blue). ‘Sea ice extent’ is the total area of the ocean having an ice concentration of at least 15%. In line with the general decrease of ice in the Arctic, the ice extents in 2004 were lower than the 25-year average in each month of the year. Still, as is typical, the ice in 2004 reached its maximum extent in March and its minimum extent in September. (Data from the SSM/I instrument on the DMSP F13 satellite, plotted by Nick DiGirolamo; background photograph by Claire Parkinson.)