

Birds of the Arctic

Birds withstand the extreme cold through **insulation, special behaviour** and **heat exchange**.



Puffin

Insulation

Some birds have feathers right down their legs to their toes to help keep their feet warm.

Counter-current heat exchange.

Periodic increases in blood flow allow a little heat to reach the foot and prevent it from freezing.

Some birds huddle together to keep warm and may even change colour depending on the season.

Some 280 species of birds live in the Arctic regions.



The **Arctic Tern** is famous for its polar-to-polar migration. By going from Arctic summer to Antarctic summer, they experience more daylight than any other animal or bird on Earth.

Some birds have white plumage to help them blend into the winter snow. Some like the **Ptarmigan**, replace their white feathers with speckled brown ones in spring so they can blend into the tundra vegetation after the snow melts.



Thick-billed Murre



Snow bunting



Many sea birds breed in huge colonies, often with other species, in order to benefit from “safety in numbers”.

In the **Arctic**, life in the sea and life on land are closely connected.



Snowy Owl

Seabirds play an important ecological role – they enrich the ground and contribute to the lush vegetation that herbivores like reindeer, geese and ptarmigans live off.

Some birds escape the Arctic winter by **migrating** south to warmer climates. It takes a very long time to fly but the birds know exactly where they are going.



Gryfalcon



Only a dozen or so species of birds can live in the Arctic all year round.

The **little auk** is the most common and widespread seabird of the north. A pair of little auks adds about 1 kg of faeces to the soil, which acts as fertilizer, in one season. Without birds there would be no plants. Imagine that!

Guillemots are sea birds that nest in huge colonies often with tens of thousands of pairs squeezed onto narrow cliff ledges. When the birds start to fly, the arctic fox waits in the hope of an easy meal.



Eider