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Arctic animals

The Arctic is home to an amazing variety of animals. Terrestrial (land) animals, marine (sea) animals and birds have all adapted to live in this harsh environment and survive the extreme weather conditions.





Birds

Up to 200 different species of bird are able to survive in the Arctic. Many birds, such as the Arctic tern, barnacle goose and Bewick's swan live in the Arctic during the warmer summer months. However, a few species of bird – including the snowy owl – have adapted to live in the Arctic all year round.



Did you know?

Arctic foxes and Arctic hares both have white coats in winter and brown or grey coats in summer. This helps to camouflage them against their surroundings, depending on the season.



Terrestrial animals

Many terrestrial mammals, including polar bears, Arctic wolves, Arctic foxes and Arctic hares, are unique to the Arctic region and can only be found in the Northern Hemisphere. During the coldest winter months, they migrate to the lands that surround the Arctic.

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Arctic weather

The Arctic is one of the coldest places on Earth. It is also one of the driest, with very little precipitation over the course of a year. In fact, the world's second largest desert is in the Arctic! It's easy to imagine that the land is permanently covered in snow and ice. However, the landscape changes in the summer months, when some of the snow and ice melts.

Temperatures can actually reach as low as -68°C in some parts of the Arctic during the freezing winter months. However, temperatures have been known to reach up to 30°C in some parts of the Arctic during the summer months. Overall, the average temperatures are rising in the Arctic.









Temperature and precipitation

The Arctic is made up of both land and sea, so the weather in different areas can vary significantly. The table below shows the average daily temperature and monthly precipitation for the Arctic Village, Alaska.

Can plants survive the weather conditions?

Over 1,700 species of plant (including Arctic cottongrass, purple saxifrage and Arctic poppies) have adapted to survive the freezing conditions of the Arctic. For the majority of the year, the Arctic's permafrost (layer of frozen soil) remains frozen. However, during the slightly warmer summer months, the permafrost thaws allowing small, shallow-rooted plants to grow.

Arctic Village, Alaska	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average temperature (°C)	-30.7	-27.9	-18.9	-10	3.5	12.5	14.3	9.5	0.2	-11.7	-23.6	-24.7
Average precipitation (mm)	11.2	6.6	10.4	5.8	15.5	35.8	42.7	36.1	35.1	15.2	11.4	10.2



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Arctic people



The Arctic region is made up of parts of Canada, Alaska (a state of the United States), Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Greenland and Iceland along with the Arctic Ocean itself. People have lived in different regions of the Arctic for thousands of years and the population is now approximately 4 million. People originally from the Arctic are known as indigenous and many indigenous groups still live in the Arctic. Newer immigrants also make up today's population.

Today's settlements

Today, the Arctic is made up of small villages, towns and cities. Some of the towns and cities are very modern, with access to facilities including the internet and satellite televisions. Other settlements are more traditional with few modern-day amenities.





Indigenous groups

Over 40 different indigenous groups of people live in the Arctic. A well-known group are called the Inuit. The early Inuit learnt to adapt and survive in the harsh conditions of the Arctic and became skilled hunters. They developed their own hunting technology, built their own homes and had their own unique language, cultures and traditions. However, many of these traditional skills are being lost as modern life takes over.

Did you know?

The Inuit were experts in shelter building. Temporary shelters, called igloos, were made from blocks of snow. More permanent shelters, called turf huts, were made out of turf, stones and wood.

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