

# Arctic Animals

Click on the pictures below to take you to the page with information about how these animals have adapted to the Arctic.

## Caribou



## Musk Oxen



## Polar Bears



## Siksiks



## Seals



## Lemmings



## Narwhals



## Beluga Whales



## Terns



## Peregrine Falcons



# Caribou

Caribou have adapted well to their northern climate. They have special hairs which trap air giving them great insulation. These hairs also help keep them buoyant in the water. They are excellent swimmers and can move across wide rushing rivers and even the ice of the Arctic Ocean! They live on lichen and are able to survive in the barren tundra because they dig with their hooves to find the lichen. They eat many different kinds of lichen. In the winter they travel hundreds of miles south to survive. This is how they have adapted for thousands of years.



Jewel Lichen



A caribou family crossing the tundra

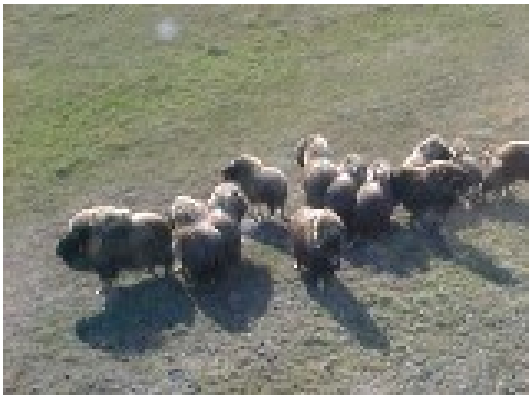


Photo©Corel

Caribou swimming in the Arctic Ocean

# Musk Oxen

Musk Oxen have adapted well to their northern environment. They have thick, heavy fur to keep them warm through the winter. This also keeps them cool in the summer. To protect themselves and their young they form a protective circle around the young with their rear ends together and their horns facing out. They are vegetarians but have been know to snag a wolf with their horns and toss it into the air. If the wolf doesn't get away they will stomp it to death. They live in family herds and move across the tundra eating lichens and arctic plants. They are amazing and well adapted to their arctic climate



Musk oxen forming a protective circle



Tundra plants

# Polar Bears

Polar bears have adapted well to their northern climate. Their hair follicles are hollow so that they have a natural insulation to the cold. They have fur on the soles of their paws so that they are able to grip the ice when walking or running. They swim well in the arctic waters with this insulation and their paws are webbed to make swimming easier. In the winter they have their young in snow dens. This time of the year is safe for the young cubs. Polar bears have inhabited the Arctic for a long time.



Polar bear on the ice



Mother and cubs

# Siksik

(Arctic Ground Squirrel)

The siksik has adapted well to its northern environment. It is the only arctic animal that truly hibernates in the winter. The siksik digs tunnels in the tundra and they live in colonies there. The den is lined with lichens, leaves, and musk ox hair. In the spring and summer the siksik eats tundra plants, seeds, and fruit so that they have lots of body fat to last them through the winter. They also store food in their dens that will last them until new growth occurs in the spring. They are well adapted to the north.



Siksik peeking out of his burrow



Arctic plants that are used for lining the den.

# Seals

Seals have adapted well to the arctic climate. They have a thick layer of blubber to keep them warm in the cold Arctic Ocean. This blubber is the main reason that they are hunted by the Inuit as it is used in the kullik (lamp) for heat and light. The ringed seal spends most of its time underneath the ice and is able to dig breathing holes with its strong claws. They can stay underwater for a long time without having to breathe. When the young are born they are white so that they are camouflaged on the ice. They do need to grow their dark, thick pelt before being able to swim in the arctic waters. Seals have adapted very well to their environment.



Photo © B. Christman  
Arctic Seal

# Lemmings

Lemmings have adapted well to the arctic environment. In the summer, they blend in with the tundra because their fur is brown. In the winter their fur is white so that they blend in with the snow. At this time they hide in shallow burrows to stay away from the snowy owl and other predators. Lemmings certainly have adapted well to their environment.



Lemming peeking out of burrow



Berries that they like to eat.

# Narwhals

Narwhals have adapted well to the arctic waters. They have a thick layer of blubber to keep them warm. Their tusk or horn (a tooth) might help them to dig air holes in the ice. It might also be able to sense the salinity and temperature of the water. In the winter they move away from the coast and live in holes and leads in the densely packed ice. They have no dorsal fin. Narwhals have lived in the arctic waters for thousands of years.



Male Narwhal (only one with tusk)

## **Beluga Whale**

Beluga whales have adapted to the arctic waters. They are white in colour, although this does not happen until they are about six. Their blubbery fat keeps them warm in the northern oceans. They are one of the three whales that spend their lives in arctic waters. The other whales are the narwhal and bowhead. These whales do not have a dorsal fin, earning them the name “dolphin without a wing”. They are well adapted to the arctic environment.



Beluga underwater

## Arctic Tern

The arctic tern has adapted well to the northern climate. It doesn't stay there for the winter. It only spends the summer in the Arctic, travelling south to Antarctica for the summer there. It has the longest migration of any other animal, travelling 50,000 km per year. If the arctic tern lived until it was 20 it would have travelled the distance from the earth to the moon and back. WOW! It is even able to return to the same nesting ground where it was born. They are a truly amazing bird.



Young tern



Mother tern

## Peregrine Falcon

The peregrine falcon has adapted well to the northern environment. It leaves during the winter and migrates south. In the summer it flies high over the tundra looking for food such as lemmings, voles, and small birds. They breed in nests hidden in rocky cliffs throughout the arctic. They even nest on the ranges that are put up for ship navigation purposes where there are no cliffs to have a nest. The falcon is certainly an amazing arctic animal.



Young falcon in nest



Mother falcon hovering over nest