



# Polar Regions: Arctic and Antarctic



## The Arctic

The Arctic is mostly made up of ocean. In fact, there is no land where the North Pole is itself.

Much of the Arctic Ocean contains sea ice during the winter, though the amount of sea ice is becoming less and less as global warming continues. The Arctic Circle is surrounded by land belonging to many different countries. These include the north coasts of Russia, Canada and Greenland amongst others.

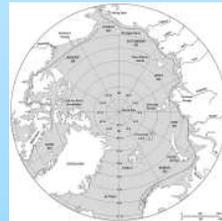


Image of the Earth with Antarctica at the bottom .

The wildlife of the Arctic and Antarctic are quite different, though in both regions it has to cope with extreme low temperatures. Here are some of the animals found in polar regions:



Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) are large herbivores with a wide distribution across Northern Europe, Russia and North America.



Walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*) are large mammals related to seals and sea lions. They have large tusks which they often use to pull themselves out of the water. In the water they feed on fish and clams.



The snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) is an Arctic bird of prey. Males are pure white, but females and young owls usually have a some darker patterns on their feathers.

Although wolves (*Canis lupus*) are found in many places in North America, Eurasia and the Middle East, it is only in Northern regions that they are not endangered.



The Arctic Fox (*Alopex lagopus*) is another mammal found in Arctic regions. It has the warmest fur of any mammal. Most are white in winter, moulting to a grey-brown in winter. Others moult from chocolate brown to a lighter, blue-tinged brown in winter.



Musk Ox (*Ovibos moschatus*) are large Arctic mammals (1.4m high at the shoulder) related to goats.



Perhaps the most famous animals of the Arctic are the Polar Bears (*Ursus maritimus*). These large bears use thick fur and blubber for insulation against the cold. Recent records show a 20% decrease in the population of Polar Bears, a significant decrease in the average body mass of these animals, and plummeting cub survival rates. Scientists believe that global warming and the reduction of polar sea ice make Polar Bears extinct within the century!



The Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) breeds in the Arctic, but migrates to the oceans around Antarctica and back each year.



This is the longest known regular migration by any animal, at a huge 19,000km!



Emperor penguins are the largest of all penguins, and can be as much as 4 feet tall. They are the only penguins that breed during the winter in Antarctica.



King penguins live on sub-antarctic islands at the northern reaches of Antarctica.



The Southern Elephant Seal (*Mirounga leonina*) gets its common name from its large size, and the large proboscis in the adult male used to make roaring sounds.



The Leopard Seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*) is a major Antarctic predator, hunting in the seas around Antarctica. Their common name comes from their whitish throat patterned with black spots.

Penguins are some of the most well known animals in Antarctica. They are flightless birds, and most feed on krill, fish and squid caught while swimming underwater.

There are many different types of penguins, but only Emperor and Adélie penguins are found on the Antarctic mainland itself. Here are some of the species of penguin found in and around Antarctica.

Adélie penguins are common along the entire Antarctic coast and nearby islands.



Gentoo penguins



Macaroni penguins



Chinstrap penguin



Rockhopper penguin

The wandering albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) has the largest wingspan of any bird today – the maximum recorded measuring about 3.7m! They feed on squid and small fish from the ocean.

