

Find the Shape

Non-chronological report

Arctic Foxes – Camouflage Kings!

The Arctic, which is the most northern floating ice sheet at the tip of the world, has one of the harshest climates on Earth. Many species would succumb to its biting cold conditions in a matter of hours, but this harsh tundra (treeless plain) is home to one of the most adaptable species on Earth – the Arctic Fox.

Cute critter or cunning canid?

It would be easy to see the Arctic Fox as fluffy, fun and furry, with its small stature (the size of a domestic cat) and its habit of nose-diving into the snow to catch prey. However, in comparison to other dogs and wolves in the same family (the canid family), this fox has adapted extremely well to the frigid temperatures of our northern hemisphere.

Amazingly, the Arctic Fox has evolved to survive the most brutal conditions: bitter cold as low as -50 degrees centigrade, the changing landscapes of the Arctic tundra, and deep snow which makes its food source scarce. Grrr! Key to its survival is the fox's features. With short legs, muzzle and rounded ears – all reducing the amount of surface area for heat loss – and a thick, bushy tail for cover in cold weather, the fox has protection from the sub-zero atmosphere – like an insulating blanket!

Rounded ears for listening for prey



Thick bushy tail for warm cover

Furry feet to prevent heat loss

Fox Facts Box

- The Arctic Fox is the only canid that changes the colour of its coat.
- It is known to follow polar bears and feast off their leftovers.
- It can trek up to 100km a day searching for food.

Fluffer jacket

Moreover, its thick multi-layered, furry coat or pelage provides the best insulation of any mammal; meaning the fox doesn't shiver until the temperatures drop to -70 degrees. Every Arctic winter (between December and March), the fox loses its

brown/grey summer coat and grows a thick, white winter fur. Whilst playing a critical part in insulation, this snow-white fur helps to camouflage the fox from its prey of small animals (such as lemmings and voles), making it easier for the fox to sneak up and catch its victims more easily on this barren terrain.

Den Sweet Den

Between March and April, Arctic Foxes partner-up to form mating pairs in which they will remain for life. Once paired, the couple will dig out a new den or move into a pre-existing one, living in an extensive network of tunnels, covering as much as 100 metres squared (and with as many as 100 entrances). Living together for the 51-57 days of pregnancy, the expectant parents wait for the birth of their pups: feeding, tunnelling, trekking.

Pups!

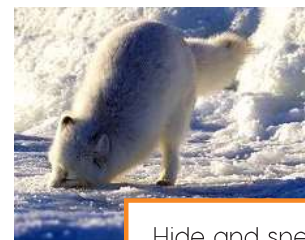
This will be a busy time for the foxes, as once they have given birth to their pups they will need to nurse, raise and feed their young over the summer months. Giving birth to one of the largest litters recorded for wild animals, the vast majority of Arctic Foxes have huge broods of 5-8 pups. Sometimes, mothers can give birth to as many as 11 baby foxes at one time – wow!

Face planting

With the winter snow desolating the fox's feeding ground, it becomes nearly impossible to scavenge and hunt. All foxes use their wide (but short) ears and their powerful sense of smell to locate small animals travelling in tunnels beneath them, in the snow. If the fox detects the faint sound of a small animal, it will carefully time its attack.

Assault Course

Digging, pouncing, diving, the fox will perform a precisely-timed assault in order to get to its prey. It either digs up or jumps head-first into the snow – to break through and access its kill beneath. Mastering the skills of carefully judging each leap, and the depths of the snow, the fox is able to feed every two days to make it through the winter.



Hide and sneak!

Under threat

Frighteningly, scientists wonder how long this winter warrior can survive, as the threat of global warming makes the fox's future as bleak as its surroundings. Shrinking Arctic sea ice has conservationists wondering whether the fox's habitat is in danger of disappearing.