

Puffins

Puffins are fascinating creatures. They are small seabirds that spend most of their lives on or near the water. For our purposes, we will be talking about Atlantic Puffins, which have bright orange bills and feet. Their bills are not always bright orange though. They start as dull gray and change to orange as they mature. Because of the bright coloring, puffins are nicknamed clowns of the sea. They are also called sea parrots because of their parrot-like beaks.

They gather in colonies in the North Atlantic Ocean, from the eastern coast of Canada and the United States to the western coast of Europe. Sometimes they are confused with penguins, but they are not related at all. They also live on the other “side” of the world – puffins in the northern hemisphere, and penguins almost exclusively in the southern hemisphere.



Puffins are approximately 10 inches tall and weigh less than a pound. They have white bellies and faces, black wings and backs. Their feet are webbed which helps them to swim and steer in the water. They can also fly very well, flapping their wings up to 400 times a minute. In fact, they can go pretty fast, up to 55 miles an hour!

They are great swimmers and divers. Their wings are like paddles that help them “fly” in the water where they hunt for food. They eat lots of small fish such as herring. They generally stay underwater for less than 30 seconds, but can dive as deep as 200 feet and stay down for up to a minute.



Puffin couples stay together, often for life. They build burrows with their beaks and claws, which they line with feathers and grass. They share incubating their eggs for about 42 days.

Baby puffins are called pufflings or chicks. They look like furry balls of feathers. They need so much food while they are growing that both of the parents have to supply them with fish! Pufflings stay in their burrows for 45 days and don't return until it is their turn to lay eggs.

Puffins can live to around 20 years in the wild.

