



## **Fox (Arctic)**

**Arctic Fox:**

*Alopex lagopus*



**Distribution:**

They live in Arctic regions of Europe, Asia, Iceland, Greenland and North America and used to be common in southern Europe including France, Britain, Germany, Poland, and Switzerland.

**Description:**

Arctic foxes have short, compact bodies and thick fur which changes colour from greyish-brown in the summer to pure white in the winter.

*Arctic fox (Image by K Morehouse at US Fish and Wildlife Service USFWS)*

**Size:**

average length is 3 feet (50-65cm) from nose to tail and 25 to 30cm tall. They weigh between 7 and 15

pounds (4.5-8kg) and the female is smaller than the male.

**Life-Span:**

5 to 7 years.

**Food:**

The arctic fox is the main predator in the arctic feeding on birds, small mammals, including seal pups, and carcasses left behind by polar bears. An average family of 11 arctic foxes can eat 60 rodents per day during the summer. Coastal arctic foxes will also eat shellfish, sea urchins and other invertebrates.

In the summer, the arctic fox may hide food in a den or push it into rock crevices until the winter. They will mark their store with scent so that they can find it again under the snow.

**Fox Habits**

**Territory:**

The arctic fox lives in one of the most inhospitable habitats on Earth. In the winter they live in almost perpetual darkness and in the summer they live through almost 24 hours of sunlight a day.

The arctic fox lives in dens that are dug into the side of a hill, cliff or riverbank. In winter they dig a series of interconnecting tunnels in the deep snow where the family live.

The territory of the arctic fox depends largely on the availability of food. During the winter when food is scarce a whole family will share a larger territory and in the summer when food is more abundant the territory shrinks.

The arctic fox does not hibernate during the winter but may migrate south to the coast or overwinter along the treeline of northern Scandinavia.

**Daily Life:**

Arctic foxes are usually solitary in the summer but in the winter they hunt and live together in small family groups.

**Breeding:**

They reach maturity at one year and mate in early April before the summer arrives. They have four to 11 puppies in a litter with an average of six and can have two litters in a year.

**Adaptations:**

The arctic fox is the only species in its genus although they are related to other foxes, wolves and dogs. They are particularly well adapted to the cold habitat that they live in with small, compact bodies that conserve body heat and thick, dense winter fur.

The winter coat is white-blue which camouflages the arctic fox against the snow and helps them to creep up on its prey. In the summer the coat is a light brown-grey and less thick.

The Arctic fox has small, rounded, furry ears which also helps them to conserve heat. They also have thick hair on their feet which insulates them against the cold Arctic snow.

**Foxes and humans**

They are not afraid of humans and have been found stealing food from camps and sniffing around men skinning seals.

Foxes that have been trapped and electronically tagged have been monitored more than 930 miles (1500km) away from where they were caught and its thought that they may travel on ice floes in the spring.

**Threats:**

The Arctic fox has suffered locally, particularly in the south of its range but overall it is quite a common

mammal.

Snowy owls, golden eagles, polar bears, wolverines and red foxes all prey on arctic foxes as well as man and their dogs. They have been hunted by man for their thick white fur (extensively so in Iceland) and have been captured and bred on fur farms.

They have also suffered from diseases such as rabies and distemper.

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