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Teaching Through Nature



Puffin Facts – Adaptation

Where do Puffins live?

Puffins nest in burrows in the ground. The males dig the burrow using their bill and feet to push the soil out behind them. Puffins often use existing burrows made by rabbits.

Do puffins return to the same burrow?

Yes. Puffins will defend their nest and reuse their burrow in following years.

Do puffins line their nest?

Yes. Puffins take grass and feathers into the nest to make a comfortable bed for their chick.

How deep is a puffin burrow?

Burrows are 1 to 1.5 metres long with the nest at the far end and a toilet at the first bend in the tunnel to keep the bed clean. As the chick grows, the toilet is moved closer to the burrow entrance, helping to keep the chick clean. If the chick became too dirty, this may damage its waterproofing.



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Why do Puffins have colourful beaks?

Puffins only have colourful beaks during the breeding season. As a puffin gets older their beak gets bigger. Birds with large colourful beaks are healthy and experienced in raising chicks making them a good quality mate. In winter the puffin's beak and feet fade in colour to a dull orange

How many fish can a puffin carry in its beak?

Puffins generally collect about 10 fish at a time, although the record stands at 62. The puffin has a special rough tongue which holds the fish it has already caught against spines on the roof of its mouth so they don't fall out while it catches more.

What's special about a Puffin's Jaw?

They have an extra bone in their jaw which allows them to open their bill and keep both parts parallel. This means they can hold a row of fish without the ones at the tip of their beak falling out.



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How are Puffins adapted to living on the sea?

Unlike many birds, puffins are able to drink saltwater and this amazing ability gives them the freedom to stay at sea for long periods of time. They also have waterproof feathers which keep them warm, dry and afloat. It is very important that they keep their feathers clean and in good condition or the birds will drown.

What happens when the puffins leave Burhou?

Between September and March when the puffins are not breeding they spend all their time at sea, with no need to return to land. They flock together, floating on the sea, in large numbers called rafts. Some puffins remain in the North Sea over winter while others prefer the warmer climates of the Bay of Biscay for their winter feeding grounds.



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Puffin Facts – Adaptation

Can puffins fly?

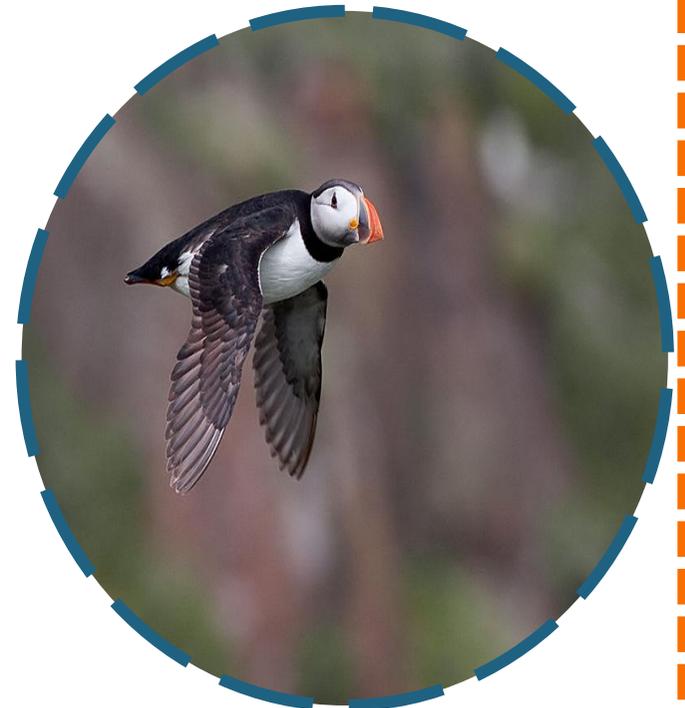
Yes, but their short wings are ideally suited to 'swimming' underwater when they dive for food. In flight their wings have to beat up to 400 times a minute to stay in the air

How fast can a puffin fly?

Puffins can reach a top speed of 55 mph.

Why do Puffins fly low over the ocean's surface?

The short wings of the puffin are ideally suited to graceful 'swimming' underwater but seem less well adapted to flight. Puffins have difficulty becoming airborne and tend to fly low over the ocean's surface. They also seem to have trouble with the landing and often crash clumsily to the ground.



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Puffin Facts – Adaptation

Puffins eat mostly small fish and young pufflings are fed fish by their parents. Feedings are usually several times a day and the adults load their beaks up with fish to bring back to the burrow.

How do puffins use their wings to propel them through the water?

When fishing, puffins can dive 24 meters into the water and stay beneath the surface for up to a minute! They use their wings to swim and glide under water - almost like flying - and they steer by using their feet as rudders.

How do they catch fish under the water?

Puffins can catch and hold up to 30 fish in their beaks at one time! Their unique beaks are specialised to catch and hold fish against spines on the palette so they don't fall out when they open up for another helping.



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Puffin Facts – Adaptation

The Puffins feathers

How does the Puffin apply oil to its feathers?

The puffin is perfectly adapted to a marine environment; it keeps its feathers waterproof by applying oil, from a gland near its tail, as it preens.

Why do puffins appear to be swimming in an air bubble when they are beneath the water?

Underwater, a puffin looks to be swimming in a silvery air bubble because the air in the feathers is partly forced out.

