

LIVE

Teaching Through Nature



Life Cycles

How do Puffins choose their partner?

Females are attracted to the males with the biggest and most colourful beaks and feathers. A colourful beak and feathers shows the male is a healthy, well fed bird and a big beak shows an older male who may be more experienced at rearing chicks.

What is billing?

To help the males and females bond they rub their beaks together and this is known as billing.

Do Puffins fight?

If males are fighting over a female or a good nesting site they will puff themselves up to look bigger, while opening their wings and beaks. They also stamp their feet and wrestle, this will often draw a crowd of puffin spectators to watch the fight. Once a male and female have formed a pair they may stay together for the rest of their lives, meeting every year at breeding time.



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Where do Puffins stay on the breeding colony?

Adult puffins arrive at the breeding colonies between March and April. When they arrive the males excavate nesting burrows in the soil, hoping to make an attractive nest for the female to lay an egg in. Puffins dig their burrows using their feet and bills, pushing the dirt out behind them like a dog digging a hole. Puffins may also use a rabbits or Manx Shearwaters burrow to save them time. If all the good burrows are taken the late comers will make nests under boulders or cracks in the cliffs.

What materials do Puffins use to line their nests?

Most nests are lined with leaves, grass and feathers making a comfortable bed for the chick.

Do pairs of Puffins return to the same nest the following year?

Yes, once the pair of Puffins have found a home they will usually return to that nest the following year.



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How many eggs does the female Puffin lay?

Puffins lay a single egg between late April and May. Eggs are usually white but may be tinged lilac, and are incubated by both parents for 36-45 days.

How many days will the Puffling chick spend in the nest?

The chick will spend between 34 to 60 days on the nest being fed by both parents. If fish are plentiful and the chick is well fed it can leave the nest early, but if fish stocks are low it takes much longer for the chicks to reach fledging weight. When the young are almost ready to leave the nest they are abandoned by their parents.

Are Puffins good parents?

Both parents take turns incubating the egg – often for up to 30 hours at a time! When a chick hatches, its parents take turns feeding it by carrying small fish back to the nest in their bills. Puffin couples usually stay together for life and reunite at the same burrow site each year.



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What is the life span of a Puffin?

Healthy Puffins can live on average for up to 18 - 20 years?

Where do Puffins spend most of the year?

Puffins spend most of the year at sea in a large colony. They only return to dry land to breed and raise their young. Puffins return to Burhou at the end of the spring season (March/April) and remain until the Puffling chicks have fledged. They will return to sea at the end of July.

How many eggs does the female Puffin lay?

The female Puffin will lay 1 egg each year. If the egg is stolen by a Gull or other Predator the adult will try and replace the lost egg. This action sometimes explains why some Puffins are late to leave Burhou and stay until August as their Puffling chick was born later than the rest.

