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Puffin Facts – Caring for the young

What colour is a Puffin egg?

Puffins lay a single egg between late April/May. The egg is usually white but may be tinged lilac?

Where does the female Puffin lay the egg?

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.

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.

Why is the toilet situated in the burrow well away from the nest?

The adults site the toilet away from the nest so that the young Puffling chick does not soil its feathers and damage its waterproofing.

Damaged feathers would probably result in death once the bird was old enough make its way out to sea.



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For how many days will the Adult Puffins sit on the egg?

The egg will be incubated for between 36 and 45 days. Both parents take turns sitting on the egg.

How do Puffins build their nests?

The Adult male Puffin will use its beak and feet to excavate and enlarge the burrow underground so that it is large enough for both adult Puffins and their chick.

How do Adult Puffins incubate the egg?

Adult Puffins do not sit on the egg but lay their wings on top of the egg.

What happens after the egg has hatched?

The two adults continue to snuggle up with the chick for the first few days after it is born. Then when the chick can keep itself warm the adults will take turns to leave the nest to find food.



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What proportion of their body weight do Pufflings need to eat each day?

To grow healthy and strong Pufflings need to consume one-third of their body weight each day.

What size is a baby Puffling?

Puffling chicks when they are born are about 10 cms tall and weigh about 2 kilograms.

What do Adult Puffins feed the young puffling?

Adult Puffins will feed the Puffling chick sand eels, fish larvae and other small fish.

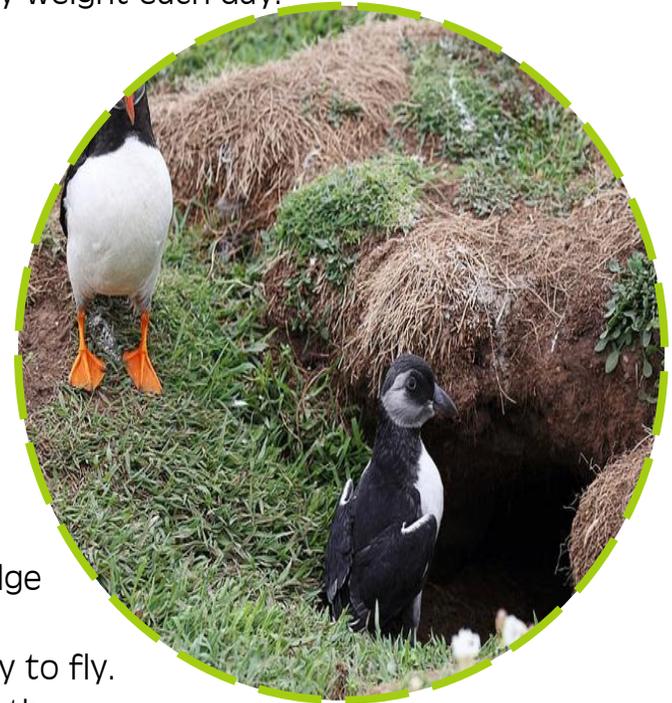
How many days does the Puffling chick spend in the nest before it fledges?

Puffling chicks will spend between 34 and 60 days in the nest before they fledge and leave the nest to join the Puffin colony at sea.

This is the time required for the Puffling to grow and acquire sufficient energy to fly.

The time will vary depending on the supply of sand eels and other small fish in the sea.

When stocks of fish are low young Pufflings will take more time to gain the necessary body weight to cope away from the safety of the burrow.



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Do adult Puffins abandon their Puffling chicks?

Adult Puffins do not abandon their Puffling chicks. However, to encourage the chick to leave the burrow and join the Puffin colony at sea they will leave the burrow once they believe the Puffling is ready to make that journey. Starved of food Pufflings will shortly after this happens leave their nest and make their way to join the colony at sea.

Fledging - What happens when the Puffling chick leaves the burrow?

When it leaves the burrow the Puffling will attempt to fly out to sea. The challenge is to stay airborne for a couple of minutes. This is sufficient time for the young bird to fly 200 to 300 metres from the beach and be safe from the gull population. At sea the young bird will continue to swim away from the land until by the morning it is several kilometres from the shore and has found the Puffin colony.

How do Pufflings find their way to the adult colony at sea?

Pufflings are guided to the sea when they leave their nests at night by the light of the moon. In some parts of the world Puffin colonies are very close to towns and villages. Some Pufflings lose their way and instead of heading for the sea mistake the street lights in the town for the moon. In communities close to Puffin colonies children will each year collect the lost Pufflings and release them on the beach.

How long do Puffins spend at sea before they return to dry land?

A Puffin will spend its first 5 to 6 years at sea. It will not return to dry land until it is ready to breed with its partner.