Arctic animals for kids: nine who live in the snow and ice, with their sizes

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Arctic animals for kids: polar bear, arctic fox, walrus, narwhal, beluga, musk ox, caribou and more, with sizes from the Park Service, NOAA and Fish and Wildlife.

The Arctic is the cold land and frozen sea around the North Pole, and the animals that live there all have a way to stay warm: thick fur, a layer of fat, hollow hair, or a coat that turns white with the snow. Nine of the animals on Peabody's snow and ice page live in the Arctic, each drawn to its true size, with numbers from the National Park Service, NOAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

One thing to clear up first, because children mix it up: penguins don't live in the Arctic. The emperor penguin lives at the other end of the world, on the sea ice around Antarctica. Polar bears and penguins never meet.

Nine Arctic animals, heaviest first

- Animal: Walrus · How big: 3 to 3.5 m long (9.8 to 11.5 ft) · How heavy: 1,680 kg (3,700 lb) · Source: Fish and Wildlife Service
- Animal: Narwhal · How big: 4 to 5.5 m long (13 to 18 ft), tusk not included · How heavy: 800 to 1,600 kg (1,760 to 3,530 lb) · Source: NOAA Fisheries
- Animal: Beluga whale · How big: up to 4.9 m long (16 ft) · How heavy: 1,430 kg (3,150 lb), average · Source: NOAA Fisheries
- Animal: Polar bear · How big: 1.5 m (4.9 ft) at the shoulder · How heavy: 181 to 658 kg (400 to 1,450 lb) · Source: National Park Service
- Animal: Moose · How big: 1.52 to 2.13 m (5 to 7 ft) at the shoulder · How heavy: 318 to 635 kg (700 to 1,400 lb) · Source: National Park Service
- Animal: Musk ox · How big: about 2.5 m long (8.2 ft) · How heavy: 200 to 400 kg (440 to 880 lb) · Source: National Park Service
- Animal: Caribou (reindeer) · How big: 0.76 to 1.5 m (2.5 to 4.9 ft) at the shoulder · How heavy: 59 to 272 kg (130 to 600 lb) · Source: National Park Service
- Animal: Arctic fox · How big: 1.09 m (3.6 ft), nose to tail tip · How heavy: up to 4.5 kg (10 lb) · Source: National Park Service
- Animal: Wood frog · How big: 5.1 to 7.6 cm (2 to 3 in) · How heavy: no checked number · Source: National Park Service

The gray wolf lives in the far north too, and Peabody lists it with the forest and the snow. See them all lined up on the snow and ice Top 10.

How they stay warm

The National Park Service's page on Arctic wildlife names the main tricks, and each animal above uses at least one.

- Extra insulation. A musk ox has two layers: long outer hair and a thick, soft woolly undercoat called qiviut, which it sheds in summer.
- Hollow hair. Caribou fur is hollow, which traps warm air and even helps them float when they swim. A moose's hair is hollow too.
- Fat. Whales such as the beluga and the narwhal have a thick layer of fat called blubber.
- White coats. The arctic fox's fur turns white in winter and brownish gray in summer, so it blends in with snow and then with the tundra. Polar bears look white too, though Peabody's polar bear page has a surprise: under that fur, the skin is black, and each hair is clear and hollow.
- Big feet. Caribou hooves spread wide like snowshoes to hold them up on soft snow, and they work as paddles in the water.

What they eat

Peabody says what each animal eats, never how. Polar bears eat mostly seals, caught at holes in the sea ice. Walruses eat clams, snails and worms from the sea floor. Narwhals eat cod, halibut and squid. Musk oxen and caribou eat plants: grasses, sedges, lichens and willow twigs. Arctic foxes eat lemmings, voles, birds, eggs and fish, and in winter they sometimes follow polar bears to eat what they leave behind. The food chain game has a snow chain: the Sun, grasses, a lemming, an arctic fox.

The frog that freezes

The smallest animal on the list is the most amazing. A wood frog in Alaska freezes solid for the winter: it stops breathing, its heart stops, even its eyes freeze. Its liver makes lots of sugar, which keeps the ice from damaging its body, and in spring it thaws and hops away. The Park Service at Kobuk Valley calls it one of the tiny masters of Arctic survival. Peabody's guide to five animal adaptations tells the whole story.

How they're doing

Three of the nine, the polar bear, the walrus and the caribou, are listed by the IUCN Red List as Vulnerable, which Peabody puts in two words: needs help. The narwhal, beluga, musk ox, moose, arctic fox and wood frog are "doing fine". The only thing Peabody asks of a child is to learn about one and tell someone. The what does endangered mean? post explains the ladder gently.

For a January lesson

Peabody's arctic animals science pack prints in four pages: a reading passage at three levels, a cut-and-sort, a worksheet and an answer key. The where do I live? quiz has a snow question too.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is Antarctica part of the Arctic?

No. The Arctic is the far north, around the North Pole; Antarctica is the far south. That's why polar bears and penguins never meet.

Is a narwhal's tusk a horn?

No, it's a very long tooth. Long ago, traders sold narwhal tusks as unicorn horns. Peabody's myth or true? game has that story.

Why is the moose on an Arctic list?

Because it lives in the cold northern forests and the edges of the snow, and Peabody's data puts it in both. It's the biggest deer in the world.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026 and has no ads. On a cold evening, the library has stories to read under a blanket.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/arctic-animals-for-kids