Amphipod

This small crustacean is found throughout the cold waters of the Arctic and is an important recycler, as it is adapted to scavenging on the seabed. A powerful swimmer, it has specialized mandibles (mouth parts) for cutting flesh and special sensory structures on its antennae to find food.

3 Arctic Flora and Fauna
Adaptation cards

AMPHIPOD *(Anonyx sp)*

Arctic Fox

The Arctic fox can be found throughout the Arctic region. Its coat is bright white in winter and brown in summer, camouflaging it from both predators and prey. To survive in the extreme cold, the Arctic fox has evolved a more rounded body than other foxes, helping it conserve heat. It also has deep, thick, warm fur and a complex circulation system that helps maintain heat in its paws.

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Adaptation cards

ARCTIC FOX *(Vulpes lagopus)*

Beluga Whale

The beluga whale is generally found in the shallow coastal waters of the Arctic Ocean. It is a medium-sized whale known for its white skin that works as camouflage to protect it from predators, such as orcas and polar bears. It doesn't have a dorsal fin, allowing it to swim easily under the ice, and its extremely thick layer of blubber (fat) keeps it warm in the icy Arctic waters.

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BELUGA WHALE *(Delphinapterus leucas)*

Canadian lynx

The lynx is a medium-sized wild cat characterized by long ear tufts, flared facial ruff and a short, bobbed tail with a black tip. Their large, fur-covered paws distribute their weight on the snow, allowing them to move quickly and easily. Lynx have thick fur to keep them warm in frigid temperatures and sharp claws to help them climb, fight predators and capture prey. Their hind legs are longer than their front legs, helping them to jump to catch prey.

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CANADIAN LYNX

Harp seal

Harp seals are social animals that spend much of their time in large colonies. They have a thick layer of fat under their skin, which helps them to conserve body heat, and water repellent fur to help them move quickly through the water. Their eyes are proportionally large and able to see well both above and below the water. Harp seal pups have fuzzy white coats, which help camouflage them in the ice and snow.

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HARP SEAL

Muskox

The muskox is well suited to surviving harsh Arctic weather. It can be found roaming the hilly regions of the Arctic tundra, especially along Banks Island. A muskox's thick, shaggy fur keeps it warm, and its powerful legs and sharp hooves allow it to dig through ice and snow to eat grasses and shrubs. With each step, its hooves spread and act similar to snowshoes on the snow.

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Adaptation cards

MUSKOX *(Ovibos moschatus)*

Narwhal

Narwhals are medium-sized, toothed whales with large tusks formed from protruding canine teeth. The species lives year-round in the Arctic Ocean and has a thick layer of blubber to protect it from extremely cold water. Narwhals hunt for food, primarily Greenland halibut, Arctic cod and squid, at depths of more than 1,600 metres and have evolved flexible and compressible rib cages to withstand water pressure. This whale can swim for more than 20 minutes without taking a breath.

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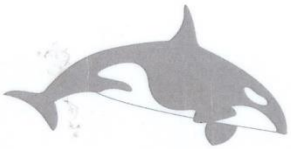
NARWHAL



Orca

Orcas (or killer whales) have a thick layer of blubber to keep them warm and protect them from predators, such as sharks. While orcas breath oxygen, their lungs are specially adapted to allow them to hold their breath for extended amounts of time. When resting, orcas and other whales enter a semi-conscious state where only half of their brain remains active, allowing them to surface for oxygen when needed. Orcas use echolocation to help them navigate the ocean, find food and avoid potential threats.

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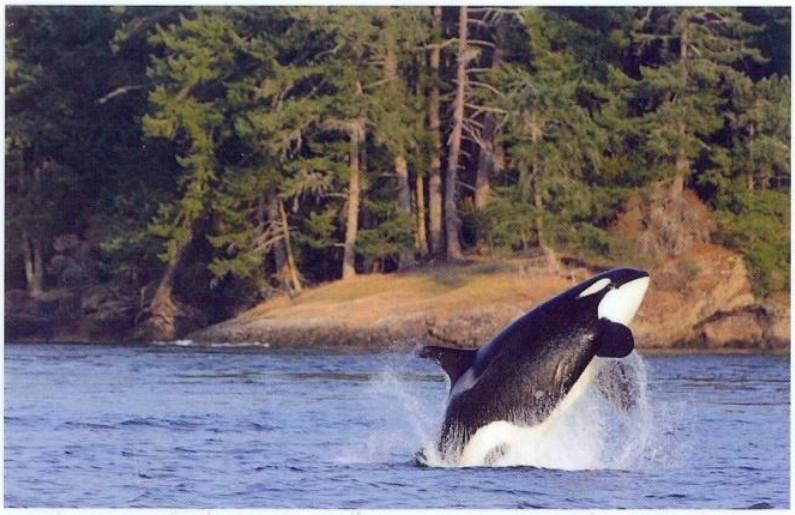
Adaptation cards



ORCA

Polar Bear

The polar bear is one of the most popular symbols of the Arctic. It can be found throughout the region along coastlines, on islands and especially on sea ice. Its white fur blends with the snow and ice, and its thick layer of fat insulates it from the cold. A polar bear's ability to swim long distances is essential for surviving on ice, which breaks up every spring. To hunt, a polar bear waits by breathing holes for prey to emerge.

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Adaptation cards

POLAR BEAR *(Ursus maritimus)*

Puffin

Puffins are specially adapted to living on the open sea. Black waterproof feathers and a thick layer of fat help keep puffins warm as they float on the ocean's surface or dive up to 60 metres underwater. They swim by flapping their wings, as if flying through the water, and use their feet to steer. Puffins can carry hold up to ten fish in their beaks at one time and have the ability to drink saltwater.

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Adaptation cards

PUFFIN

Sea otter

Unlike other marine mammals, sea otters do not have a layer of blubber to help keep them warm. Instead, they have the densest fur in the animal kingdom, ranging from 250,000 to one million hairs per square inch. A sea otter's feet are webbed, helping it to gain speed in the water. When water temperatures are extremely cold, sea otters reduce heat loss by floating on their backs with their feet out of the water. Long whiskers around their muzzles detect vibrations in the water to help them to catch fish.

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Adaptation cards

SEA OTTER

Snowshoe hare

Snowshoe hares are forest dwellers that prefer a thick cover of bushy undergrowth. They have large, furry feet that help them move on top of the snow. Their winter coat is white to helps camouflage them in the snow, while their spring and summer coat is brown to help them blend in with the forest floor. Snowshoe hares have excellent vision and feed at night on trees, shrubs, grasses and plants. They are nimble and fast, which helps them to escape predators such as lynx, foxes and coyotes.

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Adaptation cards

SNOWSHOE HARE

Snowy Owl

The snowy owl can be found in many areas throughout the Arctic Circle. Its distinctive white feathers help it to stay camouflaged and warm in the winter. Even its legs and toes have feathers which help to retain heat.

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Adaptation cards

SNOWY OWL *(Bubo scandiacus)*

Tundra swan

The snow-white tundra swan breeds in the Arctic and migrates many kilometres south to winter on North America's Atlantic and Pacific coastlines, bays and lakes. In the winter, tundra swans stay on the water, even to sleep. They are strong swimmers and take flight by running across the water while beating their wings. Downy feathers trap pockets of air close to the tundra swan's body, which keeps them warm. Their long necks and bills help them as they dip their heads underwater to search for food, such as aquatic plants, tubers and roots.

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Adaptation cards

TUNDRA SWAN

Walrus

Walruses live in one of the harshest environments on Earth. To survive the frigid temperatures of the High Arctic, walruses possess a thick layer of blubber, which keeps them warm and provides energy when food is scarce. Their blood vessels also work to trap heat by moving blood towards their main organs. Walruses often remain in pairs or groups to stay warm.

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Adaptation cards

WALRUS

Wolverine

Wolverines travel long distances in search of food, especially during the winter season. They have very powerful jaws and sharp teeth, allowing them to bite through frozen flesh and bone. Their sense of smell is highly adapted and helps them to detect hibernating prey up to six metres beneath the snow. Wolverines have a thick hide of hair to keep them warm and protect them from predators. On snow, their paws spread to twice their normal size and act like snowshoes.

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Adaptation cards

WOLVERINE