

28. “Animals of the Arctic Habitat”

by Core Knowledge Staff

Let’s take a tour of one of the coldest habitats on Earth: the Arctic tundra. In the tundra, there aren’t very many plants. In fact, there are no trees at all. The Arctic tundra is very, very cold. The wind is incredibly strong, which makes the air feel even colder. The ground is frozen and nearly everything is covered in ice. In the winter, daylight lasts only a few hours, and at times the sun does not come out at all. The temperatures are so low that most people and animals would freeze. All of these things make the Arctic tundra one of the least friendly habitats on Earth for plants and animals. Some ice will still be here in the summer, but the top layer of ice melts so that the ground gets wet and muddy.

Some plants and animals can only live in the Arctic tundra in the summer months when the temperature is warmer. Some plants and animals are able to live there all year long. Arctic plants grow very close together and do not grow very tall, which keeps them from being blown away by the Arctic winds. The kinds of plants include mosses and different types of grasses.

The animals that call the Arctic tundra habitat home all year round have adapted to the harsh conditions. This means the animal has changed over the years and now has special things that help it live in that habitat. For example, animals in the Arctic often have heavy fur coats that help them stay warm in the cold temperatures.

One creature that has adapted to the Arctic tundra habitat is called a muskox. It is adapted to the Arctic in several ways. The muskox’s long shaggy coat has an extra layer of hair underneath that keeps it warm when the temperature is cold enough to turn a rat into a freeze pop. The muskox sheds its extra coat of hair in the warmer, summer months.

Muskoxen travel in herds so they can huddle together for added warmth. They also have hooves specially adapted to this habitat. Their hooves are very wide to keep them from slipping on the snow and ice, and in the winter muskoxen use their sharp hooves to dig under the snow to find plants to eat.

Word Count: 383

NAME: _____

QUESTIONS

DATE: _____

Comprehension Questions

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Assess each student’s comprehension of the selection by asking him or her to respond orally to the following questions one on one with you:

1. **Literal** What makes the Arctic tundra one of the least friendly habitats on the earth for plants and animals?
 - » cold; strong winds; frozen ground; little daylight in the winter; little food; low temperatures
2. **Literal** How do Arctic plants keep from blowing away?
 - » They grow very close together and don’t grow very tall.
3. **Evaluative** Why would animals have adapted to the harsh conditions of the Arctic habitat?
 - » so they can continue to live in the habitat despite the harsh conditions