Polar Animals

How Do They Keep Warm?

###### How can animals survive the harsh polar weather?

The Polar Regions are the coldest places on earth, yet some creatures live there all year round. Snow and ice cover the land and sea for most or all of the year. Summers are brief and cool, with long hours of daylight. Winters are long, dark and bitterly cold. In the Arctic, mammals such as the wolf and Arctic fox have a layer of body fat and a thick coat of fur to keep them warm. The fur traps air next to the animal’s skin, which helps to prevent body heat from escaping.

###### How do Arctic foxes keep their noses warm at night?

The Arctic fox has a bushy tail up to 40 cm (16 in) long – over half its body length. When the fox is sleeping, it curls its tail around its body to cover its head and nose. The tail acts as a muff to keep the animal snug in biting winds.

###### Which polar animal has the longest hair?

Musk oxen are large beasts related to sheep and goats. Their thick coats contain two different kinds of hair. The shaggy outer layer includes hairs up to 1 m (3 feet) long. The dense, short, woolly fur beneath gives extra warmth.

###### Which animal has ears adapted to keep it warm?

In hot places such as deserts, hares have very long ears which give off body heat to keep the animal cool. In the far north, Arctic hares have much shorter ears which release less heat, while still giving excellent hearing.

###### How do birds keep warm in the Polar Regions?

Birds that live in the Arctic and the Antarctic all year round have a dense coat of feathers. Waterproof outer feathers protect the bird against the cold and wet. Underneath, soft, fluffy down feathers help retain body heat.

###### How do seals keep warm in icy water?

Seals and walruses are mammals that spend most of their lives in cold water. They have a thick layer of fat called blubber below their skin. This fatty layer keeps them warm and well-insulated in the water. Whales and polar bears also have blubber. Whale blubber can be up to 50 cm (20 in) thick.

###### How do polar animals avoid frozen feet?

An animal’s feet can be one of the coldest parts of its body, especially when, as in the Polar Regions, the feet touch the ice or frozen soil. Mammals such as polar bears and Arctic foxes have hair between their toes to prevent their paws from freezing. Some polar birds such as the ptarmigan, a type of grouse, have feathery feet for the same reason.

###### Why don’t polar animals need snow shoes?

Because their feet act like snow shoes! The feet of Arctic animals, such as polar bears and reindeer, are broad compared to those of bears and deer from warmer regions. The broad base of the foot helps to spread the animal’s weight over a wider area, so it does not sink into the snow.