



### FAST FACTS

**Name:** Atlantic puffin

**Species name:** *Fratercula arctica*

**Average height/weight:** 18 cm tall, weighs approximately 500 grams

**Life expectancy:** average 20 years

### PHYSIOLOGY

The Atlantic puffin is the smallest species of puffin. The pigeon-sized seabird's black head, back and wings contrast sharply with its white underside. An even brighter contrast exists with its vibrant orange feet and colourful orange, yellow and bluish bill. The puffin sheds its distinctive bill in the winter following the breeding season each year and its feet and bill both fade to a dull gray.

The puffin is shaped to facilitate swimming underwater with its compact body and short, powerful wings.

### HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

As a seabird, the puffin spends much of its time swimming, diving and feeding. Its diet consists of small fish, such as capelin, herring and hake. The puffin dives into the water and scoops up as many fish as it can, pinning the prey in its bill with backward-pointing spines on its tongue and the top of its mouth. The puffin can hold its breath for up to one minute underwater and can catch on average 10 fish per trip, but has been known to catch as many as 60 fish in one dive!

Despite having wings, the puffin is a poor flier. It must flap its wings 300 to 400 beats per minute to stay airborne. It also has trouble landing gracefully and often crashes and tumbles onto the sea or grass. But the puffin is a strong swimmer and its wings serve it best by helping it "fly" underwater.

The puffin comes to land to burrow and breed for four to five months a year. It normally keeps the same burrow and mate from year to year.

### RANGE

The Atlantic puffin is found in the North Atlantic Ocean. It nests and breeds along the coast of the Northeastern United States to the Canadian Arctic. Sixty percent of the population breed on islands off of the east coast of Newfoundland.