

LEVELED BOOK • Q

# Puffins



**Multi  
level  
Q•T•W**

Written by Kira Freed

[www.readinga-z.com](http://www.readinga-z.com)

# Puffins



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## Focus Question

How does the appearance of each species of puffin change during its breeding season?  
Why do these changes occur?



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Puffins are nicknamed "clowns of the sea."

## Sea Clowns

If you've ever seen a puffin, you're not likely to forget it. Even if you haven't, you probably know what these charming birds look like. Their plump little bodies, black and white feathers, and huge, colorful beaks are funny and unusual. Their appearance is just one of the reasons people enjoy watching and learning about them.



## Meet the Puffins

Puffins are seabirds—birds that spend most of their lives on the open ocean. They are skillful swimmers that zoom through the water using their wings as flippers and their feet to steer. They can dive 100 feet (30 m) or more and stay underwater for about half a minute. Puffins also fly well and can walk with ease over rocks and soil.



Puffins swim as if they're flying underwater.



When puffins fly, they flap their wings as fast as 400 beats per minute.



One of the largest Atlantic puffin colonies is in the Labrador Sea, near Canada.

Puffins live in the North Atlantic and North Pacific Oceans. From mid-spring through summer, they live in **nesting groups** on islands and **coastal** cliffs. During this time of year, the **breeding season**, they “dress up” to attract a **mate**. They have large, colorful beaks, areas of white feathers, and extra feathers for decoration. Also, their **webbed** feet become bright orange. The rest of the year, while at sea, they are mainly black, white, and gray.

The four types of puffins each have features that help people tell them apart.

## Do You Know?

The scientific name for the Atlantic puffin is *Fatercula arctica*, which is Latin for “little brother of the north.”

## Atlantic Puffin



breeding plumage



non-breeding plumage

Adult Atlantic puffins are 10 to 12.5 inches (25 to 32 cm) tall.

Atlantic puffins live on both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean. They are the smallest puffins and the least fancy when they are “dressed up.” Their beak has a bright orange tip and a blue-gray part trimmed in yellow. They have orange feet and a white face, chest, and belly.

Adult male and female puffins of each type look alike, but the males may be a bit larger. Young puffins look like non-breeding adults.

## Horned Puffin



breeding plumage



non-breeding plumage

Adult horned puffins average 15 inches (38 cm) tall.

Horned puffins live in the North Pacific Ocean, mainly south of the Arctic Circle. During the breeding season, they look like Atlantic puffins with their white face, chest, and belly. However, they have a yellow (instead of blue-gray) area at the base of their beak. They also have a thin group of black “eyelashes” above each eye. The eyelashes make horned puffins look as though they’re wearing makeup.



## Tufted Puffin



breeding plumage



non-breeding plumage

Adult tufted puffins average 15 inches (38 cm) tall.

**Tufted** puffins are found on both sides of the North Pacific Ocean. They live as far north as Alaska and as far south as Japan and central California. In contrast to Atlantic and horned puffins, tufted puffins have a black chest and belly. In winter, they're black with large red-orange beaks. During the breeding season, they have a white mask, an olive-yellow beak section, and orange eye rings. Also, they grow long gold feathers above their eyes.

## Rhinoceros Auklet



breeding plumage



non-breeding plumage

Adult rhinoceros auklets average 13.8 to 15 inches (35 to 38 cm) tall.

Rhinoceros auklets are less well known than the other puffins. They also look very different. For this reason, they are sometimes thought to be close cousins instead of actual puffins.

“Rhinos” live along the Pacific coast of North America and along the coast of Asia near Japan. During the breeding season, their thin yellow-orange bill has a short “horn” at the base. Rhinos are dark brown on their back and lighter brown on their chest and belly. They have two thin stripes of white feathers on each side of their head.

## Puffin Habits

Puffins usually return from the sea in late March or early April. During the breeding season, they often live in groups of several thousand birds.

They usually stay with the same mate and return to the same nesting sites year after year. Once they return, each pair prepares a **burrow**. Then the female lays a single egg.

Some types of puffins dig burrows in soft soil. Others make nests in openings between rocks on cliffs.



A newly hatched puffin is called a *puffling*!

Parents take turns keeping the egg warm. Both parents feed the chick for one to two months until it can fly. Puffins become adults at around five years of age. They can live for twenty years or more.



Puffins can “stack” an average of ten fish at a time.

Puffins mainly eat small fish. In winter, when fewer fish are available, they may also eat squid, shrimp, crabs, and other small animals.

Adult puffins eat underwater. They also collect fish to take back to their chicks. Puffins can carry fifteen or more fish in their beak at a time. They hold the fish with their rough tongue and **spines** on the roof of their mouth.

## Wowser!

Puffins have been seen carrying sixty or more fish at a time.



## Protecting Puffins

Humans have hunted puffins for hundreds of years for their meat, eggs, and feathers. In some places, these seabirds are still hunted. Humans also put puffins in danger in other ways. They catch large numbers of the cold-water fish that puffins eat. Warmer ocean water because of **climate change** also means less food for puffins. Some types of fish that are now common are too big for chicks to eat.

Puffins also get caught in fishing nets, and they are hurt by pollution and swallowing plastics. Humans have bothered many of their nesting areas. Puffins are also in danger because of other animals that hunt them, including gulls, eagles, rats, and foxes. In places where puffins live, people are working to solve the problems so these amazing seabirds can stay alive.



A tufted puffin patiently waits for fish—or admires its own reflection in the water!



Dr. Steve Kress

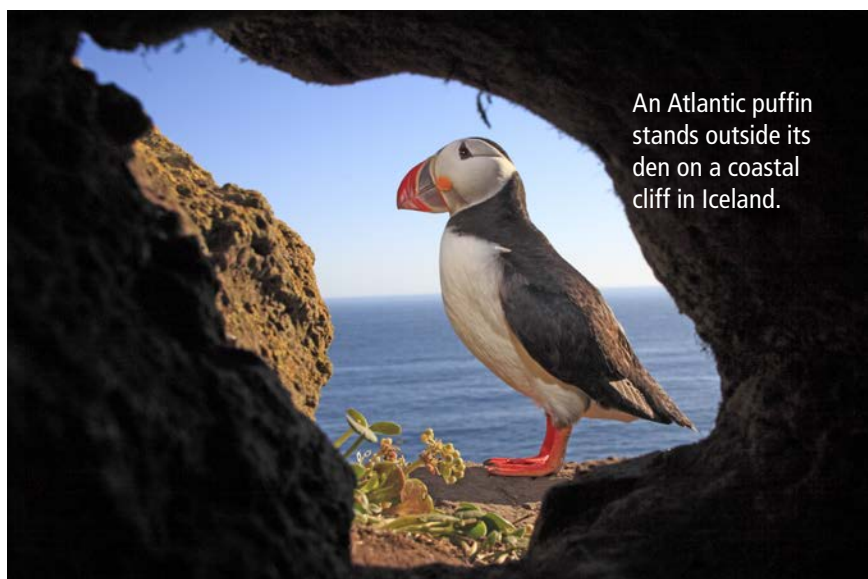
Eastern Egg  
Rock Island

## Meet a Puffin Expert

In the early 1970s, wildlife scientist Dr. Stephen Kress visited Eastern Egg Rock, a small island off the coast of Maine. Atlantic puffins had lived there one hundred years earlier. Dr. Kress wondered if it might be possible to bring them back. He started Project Puffin and figured out how to bring the birds back to Eastern Egg Rock. As of 2014, the island had 148 breeding pairs.

Project Puffin is sponsored by the National Audubon Society, which works to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats.

To learn more about Project Puffin, visit the program's website: <http://projectpuffin.audubon.org/>.



An Atlantic puffin stands outside its den on a coastal cliff in Iceland.

## Seeing Puffins

To see puffins in the wild, keep in mind that they're out at sea for many months each year. They're only on land during the breeding season. They'll mainly be found on cliffs and islands that are hard to reach. However, it's worth the effort if you can get there. Choose a place that allows people to look for wildlife.

You may have an easier time seeing puffins on a boat tour. You'll probably be able to see them from a closer distance. Wherever you go to see puffins, take binoculars and a camera. Without a doubt, you'll enjoy watching these wonderful, special birds.

## Glossary

<b>breeding season</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a time of the year when animals of a particular species reproduce (p. 6)
<b>burrow</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a hole dug in the ground by an animal for use as a home (p. 11)
<b>climate change</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the long-term, lasting changes in Earth's weather patterns or the weather patterns of a region (p. 13)
<b>coastal</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having to do with the coast of a sea or ocean (p. 6)
<b>mate</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the partner of an animal (p. 6)
<b>nesting groups</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	members of an animal species that live in the same area during the breeding season in order to find mates and reproduce (p. 6)
<b>spines</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	hard, pointed parts on the body of some plants, mammals, fish, and invertebrates (p. 12)
<b>tufted</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having a cluster of strands such as feathers, hair, or grass that grow close together (p. 9)
<b>webbed</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having fingers or toes joined by thin skin (p. 6)



# Words to Know

breeding season

burrow

climate change

coastal

mate

nesting groups

spines

tufted

webbed

Front and back cover: A group of Atlantic puffins nests on Bird Island, near Labrador, Canada.

Title page: A horned puffin is sometimes called a “sea parrot” because of its colorful beak.

Page 3: A horned puffin tries to land on a rock in the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

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Level Q Leveled Book

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## Correlation

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# Puffins

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*Word Count: 932*

## Connections

### Writing

Is it important to protect puffins? Take a stand. In a letter to your local newspaper, describe your position, including details from the book.

### Science

Pick one of the puffin types to research. Make a poster showing its habitat accurately. Include interesting facts about the puffin.

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