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The Atlantic Puffin

# The Puffin

**Latin:** *Fratercula arctica* **Irish:** Puifín

It would be hard to mistake the puffin for any other bird. It has a black and white body, large pale cheeks and a brightly coloured parrot-like bill. In summer, during the breeding season, the adult's bill is larger but in winter, it is smaller and duller. Puffins spend most of their lives out at sea, only coming to land during the breeding season, which is from April to early August. They are good swimmers and dive frequently for fish, which is their main food.

Puffins prefer to nest in colonies on offshore islands so that it can avoid mammal predators. They make use of rabbit burrows (sometimes evicting the rabbits) and also nest in cracks on steep cliffs and on broken rock fragments at the foot of cliffs. While nesting, puffin makes groaning calls.

## Puffins in Ireland

In Ireland, puffins are seen mainly on the west coast and in a few places on the east coast. Locations include Great Saltee (Co. Wexford), the Cliffs of Moher (Co. Clare) and Horn Head (Co. Donegal), as well as the Skelligs and Puffin Island off the Kerry coast.



At various times during the years, rangers at the Cliffs of Moher provide guided walks to see the puffins and other seabirds.

## The Family Tree

The puffin that is found in the North Atlantic Ocean is known as the Atlantic Puffin. There are two other puffins, the Horned Puffin and the Tufted Puffin, and these are found in the North Pacific Ocean.

Puffins are members of the Auk family. Auks are medium-sized seabirds, which only come to land during the breeding season, to nest on remote cliffs. Other members of the auk family that are found around Ireland include Razorbills, Guillemots, Black Guillemot and Little Auks.

Auks are a little like the Northern Hemisphere's version of penguins, except auks can fly.



Tufted Puffin



Horned Puffin

## Fact File:

**Body Colour:** Black back, white underneath, black head and collar, pale cheeks/face. Orange legs. Red, yellow and blue bill.

**Length:** 26-36 cm

**Weight:** 450g

**Habitat:** Breeds on sea cliffs during the summer, but otherwise out at sea.

**Eggs:** 1 per season

## What's in a Name?

The Latin name for a puffin is *Fratercula*, which means "little brother". It is thought to come from the similarity of the puffin's black and white body, to a monk's clothing.

