

Tundra

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Tundras are very cold and windy regions with very little rainfall. They are flat, treeless plains. While the conditions in tundra regions are very harsh, they are home to many plants and animals.



Fauna

Tundra regions are covered in snow for most of the year. They have short summers during which there is an increase in animal activity. Although it is too cold for reptiles or amphibians to live in these areas, a number of mammals have adapted to survive these harsh conditions. Many animals that live in tundra regions have thick coats. They also tend to have larger bodies with shorter legs and arms. Some tundra animals also have fur on their feet. These physical adaptations help animals of the tundra reduce the amount of body heat they lose.

Some animals, such as the arctic ground squirrel and the brown bear, hibernate during the freezing cold winter months. During this time, the hibernating animal will stay hidden in their den. Their breathing rate and heart rate drops. Most of their body's functions are slowed down or stopped.



Brown bear



Caribou

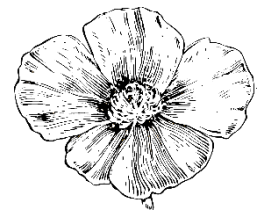
Many of the larger animals migrate during the winter months. This means they leave the tundra during the coldest months and move south, where the temperatures are warmer. Many birds migrate. Other animals that migrate include caribou and the arctic char.

Insects such as flies, grasshoppers and bees also live in tundra regions. Some of these species have high levels of the compound glycerol in their body. This acts to stop the insects from freezing.

Other animals that live in tundra regions include lynx, musk oxen, arctic foxes and polar bears.

Flora

The cold, dry conditions of the tundra make it difficult for plants to grow. Below the shallow top layer of soil is a thick layer of permafrost. Permafrost is a layer of soil that remains frozen throughout the year. This means the plants that live in tundra regions have shallow root systems. Most plant life is low growing. This helps protect the plants from the freezing temperatures and the winds that blow tiny shards of ice. The leaves of plants that grow in the tundra tend to be quite small. This helps reduce moisture loss. Common tundra flora includes arctic willow, arctic poppy, sedges, mosses, grasses and low shrubs.



Arctic poppy