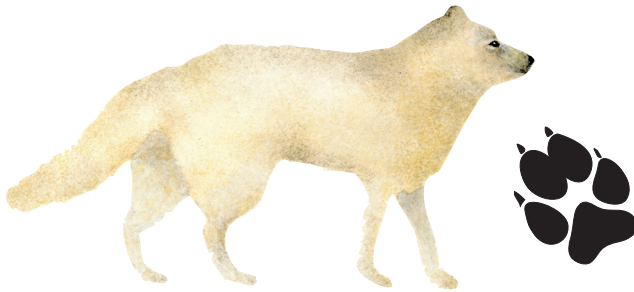




# ARCTIC FOX

*Alopex lagopus*



## Appearance

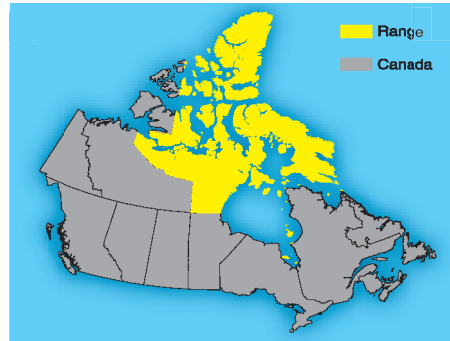
The arctic fox has a round head, a blunt nose, short rounded ears and short legs. It is the only canid to change colours with the seasons. During the winter, its thick coat is white or bluish-grey and in the summer the back, tail and outer legs turn brown and the belly and sides become a yellowish white. The summer coat is much shorter than the winter one. The arctic fox looks much bigger than it actually is because of its incredibly thick fur. After the swift fox, the arctic fox is the smallest wild canid in Canada, weighing between 2.5 and 5kg. Its long bushy tail is about half the length of its body.

## Food And Feeding

In the winter, the arctic fox feeds mainly on lemmings and voles. It will also eat arctic hare and ptarmigan when available, as well as any leftovers from wolves, bears and humans. During the summer it adds eggs, ground squirrels and fish to its diet.

## Behaviour

Arctic foxes live in dens that are dug in gentle slopes near rivers, lakes or on higher ground free of permafrost. Many dens are used for centuries and they will often store some food in them and other places, for later use. Arctic foxes usually live alone, except during the breeding season. When a group gets together to feed on leftovers from another animal they will often fight amongst themselves. Arctic foxes have a high-pitched bark and will hiss and scream, but not howl. They have a keen sense of smell and can detect lemmings in their nests under the snow. Arctic foxes are active all winter. At times, they will trail behind polar bears to scavenge food and have ended up on some of the remotest arctic islands by doing this. Although their home range varies between 16 and 25 square kilometers, they are capable of traveling far greater distances



than the red fox. For example some foxes from the Keewatin coast have ended up on Cornwallis Island.

## Range

Arctic Fox are found throughout Nunavut.

## Habitat

Arctic foxes are found mainly in arctic and alpine tundra, coastal areas and some forested areas in the southern portion of their range.

## Reproduction

Arctic foxes breed once a year between mid-February and April depending on the physical health and geographic location of the animals. At this time, they often travel with a mate. Arctic foxes can have between 4 to 25 pups at a time. The gestation period is a little bit less than 2 months. The young are born blind, deaf and toothless and weigh about 57g each. The young pups come out of the den when they are between 2 to 4 weeks old and are weaned at about this time. The pups go their own way the following spring and reach sexual maturity at the age of 9 to 10 months.

## Status Survival and Management

According to the Nunavut Wild Species 2000 report, the status of the arctic fox is currently secure. The arctic fox lives an average of four years and predators in Nunavut include humans, other carnivores and the young may be vulnerable to some birds. As the red fox continues to move further into the north, it presents a source of competition to the arctic fox for available food resources.

## Did You Know?

The arctic fox has something called 'counter-current blood circulation'. This means the feet are always supplied with warm blood and therefore they stay just above freezing temperature even in extreme cold.

