



PHOTO: DAVID A. GILL

FAST FACTS

NAME: Arctic hare

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Lepus arcticus*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 3 to 7 kg

AVERAGE HEIGHT: 50 to 70 cm

AVERAGE LIFESPAN:

Undetermined as of yet, most likely 4-5 years

DID YOU KNOW? Arctic hares have black eyelashes that protect their eyes from the sun's glare, just like sunglasses.

PHYSIOLOGY

Hares' coats change colours slightly from season to season. In winter the coat is bright white and in summer white with an ashen tinge. Despite seasonal changes, their tail is always white. Their eyes are placed on each side of their head giving them a view of 360 degrees without turning their head.

Normally they move with the front legs taking the first steps separately, followed by the hind legs stepping together. When they sense danger hares first stand up on their hind legs to assess the area, then bolt. They can jump as far as 2.1 metres in a single bound and can move approximately 60 kilometres an hour.

The Arctic hare's large back feet act like snowshoes that help to keep them from sinking in the snow. Their front feet have long, strong claws that help them dig beneath snow to find food.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Like their name says, Arctic hares live north of the treeline. They prefer dry areas in the tundra and avoid marshes.

The hares can endure the harsh winters that come with living there. In winter there is little sunlight and temperatures can go down to -40° C. However, in the winter their coat keeps them warm and makes them less vulnerable to predators, as it acts like camouflage in the snow.

Hares, unlike other mammals, do not hibernate throughout the winter. They have a great sense of smell that helps them find food buried under the ice and snow. They eat anything leafy and chew on bark, roots and willow.

They stay in herds and keep close, but they do not huddle together – they like their personal space. Hares spread out to breed, each couple preferring their own spot. Babies are born in the spring and reach maturity in six months, ready to breed in one year.

RANGE

Arctic hares live in Newfoundland and Labrador, Ellsemere Island and Northwest Territories – all locations in the tundra ecozone.