Arctic Animals

The Arctic region, which is found in the northernmost part of Europe, has an extremely harsh and unforgiving climate. There are several, different animals that call this vast, inhospitable environment their home but to be able to do this, they have had to adapt in a series of ways. If you would like to find out about some of the animals, their adaptations and how they survive, please continue to read below. I wonder if there are any similarities between the different species' adaptations?

The Arctic Fox

The Arctic Fox is an animal that can survive frigid temperatures. In summer, the Arctic Fox is a blueish brown to grey colour. However, by winter its long, luscious fur has turned pure white. The white of the fur helps the fox to camouflage from its predators and also to remain hidden from its prey until it is ready to pounce! Arctic Foxes have many adaptations to survive in the treeless environment. They have short bushy tails (that they curl around them for warmth); their ears are curled and tiny – to reduce heat-loss; and their paws are wide so that their surface areas is increased and they become less likely to slip. When it hunts, it uses its keen sense of hearing to identify the scurrying of animals below the snow. It positions itself above the prey, pounces into the air and dives through the snow, headfirst. These adaptations help the Arctic Fox to survive: flourish even!

The Polar Bear

Similarly, to the Arctic Fox, the Polar Bear has several adaptations to help it survive. The large, powerful Polar Bear (Ursus Maritmus) is covered in thick, water-repelling fur, which prevents it from freezing to death whilst hunting in the Arctic Ocean. Their paws have adapted very well over the centuries. Their wide front paws are slightly webbed: this helps them to power through the water. Interestingly, they swim with their front legs and steer with their hind legs. Finally, the pads of their feet are very rough to enhance their grip and prevent slippages. They have very sharp claws that serve two purposes: first, they are useful for hunting prey and secondly, they are necessary for digging through snow and ice to build shelters.

Protecting themselves from the harsh climate is most important. Although their fur appears white, it is actually transparent and hollow. The follicles reflect the light; making the fur appear white. The skin underneath the fur is actually black; yet another adaptation as this maximises absorption of the sun.

A female Polar Bear normally gives birth in winter and will have between 1-3 cubs. Using her sharp, powerful claws, she digs a den within snowdrifts to keep her young warm and protected. Polar Bear cubs are born blind and deaf and they rely entirely upon their mothers for the first 6 months of their lives. For the first two years of their lives, they learn how to survive from their mothers.

Snowy Owl

Snowy owls – commonly known as ghost owls by the natives – are abundantly found in the Arctic. Their colouring changes as they become older. As young owls, they often have brown bars scattered across their white plumage. However, as they become older, the brown fades and they become almost entirely white. Unusually for birds, feathers cover their feet - this is to insualte heat as much as possible.

Snowy owls are unlike most owls as they are Diurnal, meaning that they can hunt day or night. They have excellent eye-sight yet they do not rely upon this sense the most. It is their hearing that serves the owl the best. Similarly to the Arctic Fox, most of the Owl's prey is below the surface. It is a patient hunter. The owl will listen for the scurrying of lemmings, pinpoint the prey's position and dive below the snow using its sharp talons to capture the prey. It normally eats between 3-5 lemmings a day. When the prey is scarce, the owl will migrate. In addition to lemmings, the Snowy Owl will suppliment their diet with: rabbits, rodent, birds and fish.

Overall, animals living in the Arctic have survived so well because of their adpatations. Unfortunately, there are a series of new threats that could potentially harm the animals future survial: global warming, farming, loss of habitat and introduction of new speicies, just to name a few. Will the animals be able to continue to adapat? I wonder how they will need to change to ensure their species continuation? Perhaps Humans need to consider their impact on environments as it would be regrettable for species to become exinct due to thoughtlessness.