



Puffin Colony, North Atlantic, Iceland.

Source: Journal of Coastal Research, 38(2)

Published By: Coastal Education and Research Foundation

URL: <https://doi.org/10.2112/0749-0208-38.2.i>

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Puffin Colony, North Atlantic, Iceland. Known as the puffin watching capital of the world, Iceland is home to more than 60% of the world's entire Atlantic puffin population, with approximately 8 to 10 million puffins inhabiting the island. *Lundi* is the Icelandic word for puffin, however, due to their unique appearance, these little birds have been nicknamed 'sea parrots' and 'clowns of the sea.' The Icelandic nickname of the puffins is *prófastur*, which means preacher due to their plumage dressing. In fact, puffins can actually change their color throughout the year. At the end of the breeding season, some of the special characteristics of their plumage are lost when they molt. Their white feathers become dark gray and their beaks also change, becoming narrower, with a tip that is bright. The birds develop their brighter colors once again during the spring. Their winter dress is, though, seldom seen by humans since the birds can spend up to eight months out at sea. They spend most of their lives resting on waves, coming ashore only to breed and raising their young, known as pufflings. Each female produces a single puffling every year.

In late spring, thousands of puffins form large colonies on coastal clifftops, coming together for the breeding season. Puffins are monogamous, usually mating for life and staying together for over 20 years. To make their nests, also known as burrows, they dig out a clearing in the turf or soil where they lay their single egg. Each year they return to the same burrow to nest. The male and female share parental responsibilities, each taking turns to incubate the egg. It takes about 36–45 days for the baby puffling to fully incubate and hatch from the egg. After hatching, the chick grows rapidly and after about six weeks it is fully developed and capable of caring for itself. Atlantic puffins have incredible skills. They can dive to depths of about 60 m and fly at a speed of 88 km/h by flapping their wings 400 times per minute. The main reason why they need to flap their wings so fast is because their bones are not hollow like other birds. This extra weight is why they can dive down as far as they do underwater to catch their prey. (Photograph taken July 2018 by Jim Mahoney, Jupiter, Florida, USA.)