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FAST FACTS

NAME: Tundra swan

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Cygnus Columbianus*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 6.3 kg (female) to 7.5 kg (male)

AVERAGE HEIGHT: 120 to 147 cm

AVERAGE LIFESPAN: 21 years

DID YOU KNOW?

After just 70 days, a baby Tundra swan will weigh up to 28 times its birth-weight of 180 g.

PHYSIOLOGY

The feathers on the tundra swan are white. Sometimes the head and neck feathers turn slightly red if the swans are in areas of iron-rich food. Their legs, feet and beak are black and they have a distinctive yellow mark close to the eyes. Baby swans are grey in colour with pink legs, beak and feet. Within two years, they develop their adult plumage.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Tundra swan feed on aquatic plants, roots, grains and some shellfish. To get their food from underwater, the swans tip their bodies and extend their long neck and head into the water. They barely ever dive all the way in.

Tundra swans live in the Canadian Arctic and Alaska. In severe winters, some birds choose not to head further south in search of warmer weather. Instead, they sleep on the ice and tuck their heads into their wings to keep warm.

They travel in flocks, but when it comes to breeding these birds want to be left alone. Each pair claims an area roughly two kilometres square. This is large enough for baby swans to feed and play, but not too large to defend against other breeding pairs.

Nests are usually close to a tundra pond or lake, and those in favourable locations often reuse the same area from year to year. On average, females hatch three to five eggs and sit on them until they hatch, usually 32 days. Male tundra swans don't help with incubation, but they stay close to the nest and guard against any predators, such as foxes, wolves, bears, weasels and golden eagles.

RANGE

There are two populations of tundra swans, one found in the West and one in the East. They breed in the Canadian Arctic and Alaska. The Eastern population winters on the Atlantic Coast in Chesapeake Bay, Maryland and North Carolina. The Western population winters on the Pacific Slope: mainly in California.