



Antarctica is the world's most hostile environment but also the most fascinating. It holds the keys to understanding Earth's past climate and crucial in understanding its future. It's the driest, windiest, coldest, highest continent on Earth and holds 70% of the world's fresh water and yet it is classed as a desert!

If all the Antarctic ice were to melt the world's sea levels would increase by 60 metres!

The coldest recorded temperature on Earth occurred in 1983 at Vostok Station, Antarctica, measuring a rather chilly -89.2°C .

The sun sets in March and rises in October.

It's a desert!! The inner regions of the continent receive an average of 50 millimetres of precipitation primarily in the form of snow each year. More rain falls in the Sahara desert.

Antarctica is the best place in the world to find meteorites. Dark meteorites show up against the white expanse of ice and snow and don't get covered by vegetation.

Antarctica contains 70 per cent of the world's fresh water and 90 per cent of the world's ice.

The average ice thickness is 4 km and in some parts is over 5 km thick.

In winter Antarctica grows to twice the size of Australia!

It has an average elevation of 2,500 metres above sea level which makes it the highest of all continents.

The cold and dry conditions in the Dry Valleys region of Antarctica are so close to those on Mars that NASA did testing there for the Viking mission.

Emperor penguins are highly adapted to cold environments and are the only animal that breeds during the Antarctic winter.

There are no polar bears in Antarctica!

The South Magnetic Pole is in a different location to the South Geographic Pole

Antarctica once had thick vegetation and dinosaurs.

Antarctica is the only continent with no native species of ants.

The average wind speed at Cape Denison where Mawson's Huts are situated is over 80 km/h. It is officially the windiest place on earth at sea level. Winds have been recorded at 350 km/h.

A fully grown blue whale eats about 4 million krill per day. That's 4 tons every day for 6 months. This daily intake would feed a human for 4 years!

One of the biggest icebergs ever broke free from the Ross ice shelf, Antarctica in 2000. It was 295km long and 37km wide, with a surface area of 11,000 sq km above water and 10 times bigger below.



Want to know more?

<http://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica>
<http://www.coolantarctica.com/>

Activity:

- Find out some more interesting facts about Antarctica and add them to your map.



Did you know that almost all animal life in the Antarctic is dependent on the ocean? This page lists a few of the animals that exist in and around Antarctica.

Penguins

There are just 17 species of penguin worldwide, 7 species live and breed in the Antarctic or sub Antarctic. These are the **Emperor penguin**, **Chinstrap penguin**, **Adélie penguin**, and **Gentoo penguin** (Antarctic) and **Macaroni penguin**, **King penguin**, and **Rock Hopper penguin** (Subantarctic). The male emperor penguins spend the entire winter huddled in groups while incubating the egg which is kept balanced on top of their feet.

Albatross

Albatross are large seabirds that spend most of their lives at sea. The **Wandering Albatross** has an average wingspan of 3.1 m which is the largest of any bird. It spends most of its life in the air and only lands in order to feed and to breed.

Krill

It may be small, but the Antarctic Krill is one of the most important animals in the Antarctic food chain. This small, shrimp-like crustacean is found in vast numbers in the Southern Ocean, forming groups called swarms which can be seen from space.

Seals

Seals are found all around the world, but most species prefer colder regions. Seals found in the Antarctic include the **Southern Elephant Seal**, the **Crabeater Seal**, the **Antarctic Fur Seal**, **Leopard Seal**, **Ross Seal** and **Weddell Seal**.

Whales

Whales are attracted to the cold waters of the Antarctic region by the huge swarms of Antarctic Krill. These include the **Southern Right whale**, **Antarctic Minke whale**, **Blue whale**, **Humpback whale**, **Sperm whale**, and the **Southern Bottlenose whale**.



King Penguins | Photo: Clint D.



Black Browed Albatross | Photo: Jaimie Cleeland



Antarctic Krill | Photo: Stephen Brookes



Elephant Seal pup | Photo: Robby Van Togeran



Humpback Whale | Photo: Dave & Fiona Harvey

Want to know more?

- <http://www.coolantarctica.com>
- <http://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/wildlife>

Activity:

- What other animals and plants exist in and around Antarctica?
- In what ways are they adapted to their environment?