



Alaska Puffin Guide

Your Complete Guide to Alaska's Colorful "Clowns of the Sea"



Few birds capture the hearts of Alaska visitors quite like the **puffin**. With their colorful beaks, bright orange feet, and comical expressions, puffins have earned the nickname "**Clowns of the Sea.**" Despite their playful appearance, these remarkable seabirds are expert divers and powerful swimmers that spend most of their lives on the open ocean.

Alaska is home to **two species of puffins**—the **Horned Puffin** and the **Tufted Puffin**. During the summer breeding season, thousands gather on rocky coastal islands and sea cliffs, making Alaska one of the best places in North America to see these fascinating birds.

Whether you're cruising through Kenai Fjords, Glacier Bay, or the Inside Passage, spotting a puffin is always a highlight of an Alaska adventure.



Quick Facts



Species Found in Alaska:

- **Horned Puffin**
- **Tufted Puffin**

Height:

- About **15 inches (38 cm)**

Weight:

- **1–2 pounds**

Lifespan:

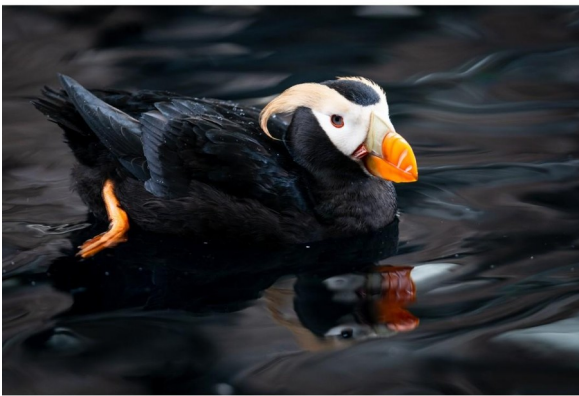
- 15–20 years

Diet:

- Small fish
- Sand lance
- Capelin
- Herring
- Squid
- Krill

Puffins use their wings to "fly" underwater while chasing fish.

Where Can You See Puffins?



The best places to see puffins include:

- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Resurrection Bay
- Glacier Bay National Park
- Prince William Sound
- Kodiak Island
- Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge
- Gulf of Alaska
- Sitka area

Boat excursions offer the best opportunities because puffins spend much of their lives offshore.

★ Horned Puffin vs. Tufted Puffin



Alaska is one of the few places where visitors may see both species.

Horned Puffin

- White face
- Bright orange beak
- Small black "horn" above the eye
- More common in offshore colonies

Tufted Puffin

- Entirely black body
- Bright orange beak
- Long golden feather tufts during breeding season
- More commonly seen in Southeast Alaska

Both species are equally entertaining to watch.

Amazing Divers



Puffins are extraordinary underwater hunters.

They can:

- Dive over **200 feet**
- Use their wings to swim
- Catch multiple fish on a single dive
- Hold several fish in their beak at once using specialized spines inside their mouths

Watching a puffin return to its nest carrying a beak full of fish is unforgettable.



Can You See Puffins on an Alaska Cruise?

Yes!

While sightings from large cruise ships are possible, the best opportunities come during:

- Kenai Fjords wildlife cruises
- Glacier Bay scenic cruising
- Small-ship expeditions
- Resurrection Bay excursions
- Prince William Sound wildlife cruises

Bring binoculars because puffins are smaller than many other seabirds.



Photography Tips



For the best photos:

- Use a telephoto lens.
- Photograph puffins while they're resting on the water or cliffs.
- Use burst mode for birds in flight.
- Look for puffins carrying fish.
- Include rocky cliffs or ocean scenery for dramatic compositions.

Patience is key—they're fast fliers but often return to the same nesting areas.



Best Time to See Puffins

May

Excellent.

Breeding season begins.

June

Outstanding.

Colonies are full of activity.

July

Peak viewing.

Adults are busy feeding chicks.

August

Excellent.

Young birds begin leaving their nests.

September

Good.

Many puffins return to the open ocean.



Interesting Behaviors

Puffins are known for:

- Carrying multiple fish at once.
- Nesting in burrows or rocky crevices.
- Flying surprisingly fast despite their small wings.
- Spending most of their lives at sea.
- Returning to the same nesting colony each year.

Outside the breeding season, they rarely come to land.



What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera

- ✓ Telephoto lens
- ✓ Waterproof jacket
- ✓ Polarized sunglasses

Puffins are small, so binoculars make spotting them much easier.

Premium Travel Group Tip

If seeing puffins is high on your Alaska wish list, book a wildlife cruise in **Kenai Fjords National Park** or **Resurrection Bay**. These smaller boats can often get much closer to nesting colonies than large cruise ships, giving you incredible views of both Horned and Tufted Puffins.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Bald Eagle Guide
 - Sea Otter Guide
 - Harbor Seal Guide
 - Humpback Whale Guide
 - Orca Guide
 - Kenai Fjords National Park Guide
 - Glacier Bay National Park Guide
 - Seward Cruise Port Guide
 - Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (*future guide*)
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Fun Facts

- Puffins can carry **10–20 small fish** in their beaks at one time.
 - They flap their wings up to **400 times per minute** while flying.
 - Despite looking awkward in the air, they're excellent swimmers underwater.
 - Their colorful beaks become brighter during breeding season and fade during winter.
 - Puffins spend most of their lives at sea, returning to land only to breed.
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Why Are Puffins So Special?

Puffins are one of Alaska's most beloved seabirds because they combine colorful beauty with remarkable adaptations. Their bright beaks, entertaining personalities, and incredible diving abilities make every sighting memorable. Whether you see one perched on a rocky cliff or flying low over the ocean with a beak full of fish, puffins perfectly represent the charm and diversity of Alaska's coastal wildlife.



Joe's Logbook

Puffins are proof that not every amazing Alaska wildlife encounter has to involve something huge. They're small compared to whales or bears, but they have a way of stealing the show.

The first thing most people notice is that colorful beak, but what really impressed me was watching how effortlessly they dive and return with several fish at once. They may look a little clumsy on land, but in the water they're incredibly skilled hunters.

If you're taking a wildlife cruise in Kenai Fjords or Resurrection Bay, don't spend all your time looking for whales. Keep an eye on the rocky cliffs and the water nearby. Spotting a puffin carrying a beak full of fish back to its nest is one of those uniquely Alaskan moments that always brings a smile.