ANTARCTICA

This frozen land has barely any vegetation and the coldest temperatures on Earth (−89.2°C; −128.6°F). It’s hard to imagine anything surviving here, but a few hardy animals have found a way...

Fastest swimming bird
No other bird is faster in water than the gentoo penguin, clocked swimming at short bursts of 36 km/h (22 mph). They leap out of the water to catch their breath and to avoid predators - a manoeuvre known as ‘porpoising’.

Largest carnivore
Reaching the length of a car and the weight of two hippos, male southern elephant seals (bulls) even dwarf polar bears! The females (cows), by contrast, can be as much as eight times lighter. They live mainly on the shores of sub-Antarctic islands.

Largest land animal in Antarctica
Several seal and penguin species pass many months on the icy fringes of the Antarctic, but a lot of their time is spent in the water. On the continent itself, the biggest permanent resident (excluding human scientists) is the tiny 1.2-cm (0.4-in) Antarctic midge!

Fastest marine mammal
Orcas, aka killer whales, have been recorded reaching speeds of 55.5 km/h (34.5 mph), which is faster than a galloping horse. These pack hunters, the largest dolphin species, have been known to exhaust their prey by chasing it for hours.

Largest living penguin
Emperor penguins stand 1.3 m (4 ft 3 in) tall; about the same height as an eight-year-old child. They huddle in colonies that can be 20,000 strong. A 2018 study reported on a tagged emperor penguin diving in the Ross Sea for 32.2 min - the longest underwater dive by a bird.

Heaviest colossal squid
Cold Antarctic waters are far richer in oxygen than those in warmer climes. This could be one of the major reasons why polar sealife grows extra-large. A colossal squid (right) found in the Ross Sea by fishermen in 2007 tipped the scales at 495 kg (1,091 lb).

Key
1. Gentoo penguin
2. Pike icefish
3. Snow petrel
4. Southern elephant seal
5. Sei whale
6. Ross seal
7. Antarctic midge
8. Brown skua (largest skua)
9. Antarctic petrel
10. Antarctic toothfish
11. Sperm whale (heaviest brain)
12. Emperor penguin
13. Leopard seal (most dangerous pinniped)
14. Marbled rockcod
15. Hourglass dolphin
16. Arctic tern (longest migration by a bird)
17. Adélie penguin
18. Blue whale (largest animal ever)
19. Weddell seal
20. Crabeater seal (most common seal)
21. Orca
22. Colossal squid