

Life on the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain

Those in favor of opening the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling often call the region "barren," and it can appear that way at first glance. But look again. The plain boasts the greatest wildlife diversity on Alaska's northern coast, with denning polar bears, a year-round population of musk-oxen and many dozens of bird species—including vast numbers of migratory waterfowl. The refuge's best known symbol is the 150,000-strong Porcupine caribou herd (named for a river), which migrates to the coastal plain every summer to feed, calve and seek ocean breezes for relief from mosquitoes.

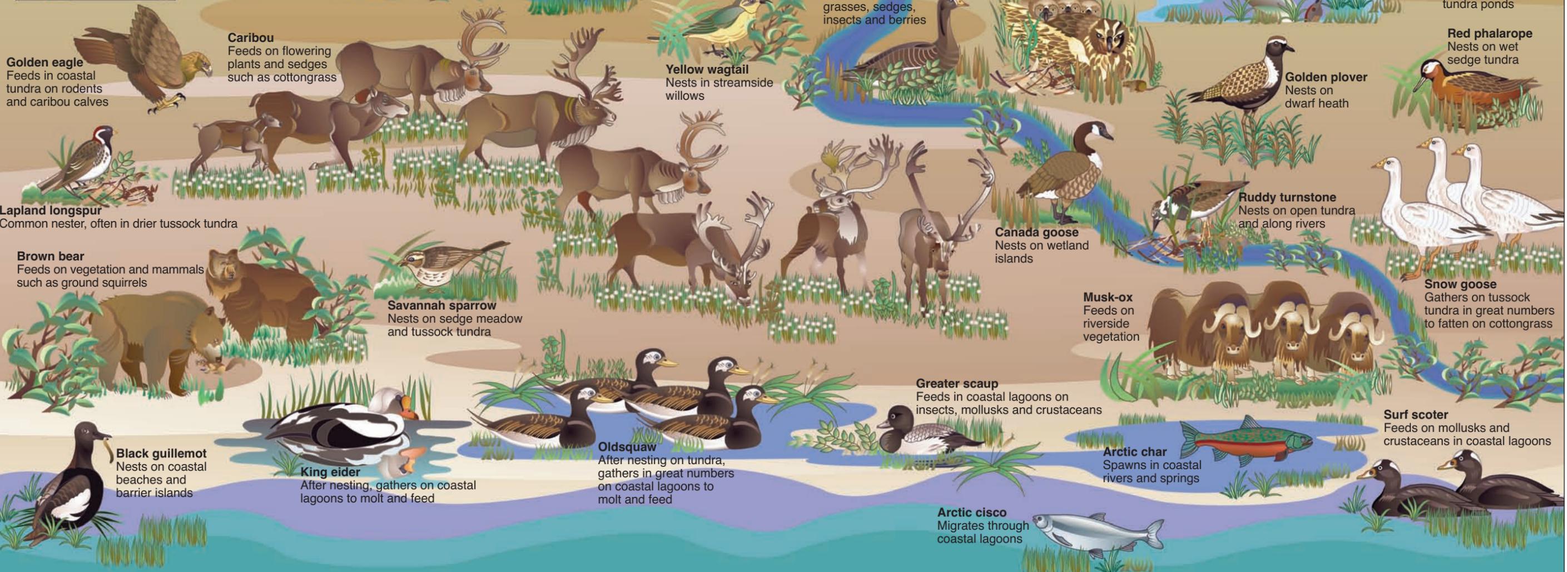
In a spring and summer explosion of life, more than 100 animal species (many of which are named in the border of this illustration) make use of this vast and untouched wetland, which is framed by the Beaufort Sea on one side and the Brooks Range only 20 to 40 miles inland on the other.

This illustration includes a sampling of that wildlife and indicates some of the ways the animals use their ecosystem, which is made up of mini habitats ranging from barrier islands, to sedge meadows, to tussock tundra.



Northern Shrike • Wilson's Warbler • Hoary Redpoll • Savannah Sparrow • American Tree Sparrow • Lapland Longspur • Smith's Longspur • White-crowned Sparrow • Snow Bunting • Arctic Char • Lake Trout • Arctic Grayling • Arctic Cisco • Slimy Sculpin

Rough-legged Hawk • Golden Eagle • Gyrfalcon • Peregrine Falcon • Merlin • Willow Ptarmigan • Rock Ptarmigan • Semipalmated Plover • Lesser Golden Plover • Black-bellied Plover • Ruddy Turnstone • Snipe • Whimbrel • Pectoral Sandpiper • Least Sandpiper



Golden eagle
Feeds in coastal tundra on rodents and caribou calves

Caribou
Feeds on flowering plants and sedges such as cottongrass

Long-tailed jaeger
Feeds on eggs and small birds

Peregrine falcon
Nests on cliffs and river bluffs

Lake trout
Lives in larger lakes, in foothills, that do not freeze to the bottom

Arctic fox
Dens in coastal hills, stream banks and pingos (mounds created by pressure under permafrost)

Arctic ground squirrel
Builds dens on low hills, ridges and pingos where soils are well drained

Rock ptarmigan
Nests on drier vegetation

Gyrfalcon
Feeds mostly on birds, especially ptarmigan

Collared lemming
Burrows in tussock tundra

Red-throated loon
Nests along ponds and feeds on fishes in coastal waters

Tundra swan
Builds nests in open tundra ponds

Arctic grayling
Spawns in tributary streams

Snow bunting
Nests in rock cavities and coastal drift material

Tundra Vole
Feeds on and inhabits rich tundra meadows

Short-eared owl
Nests on coastal tundra in years of rodent abundance

White-fronted goose
Feeds on marsh grasses, sedges, insects and berries

Red phalarope
Nests on wet sedge tundra

Yellow wagtail
Nests in streamside willows

Golden plover
Nests on dwarf heath

Lapland longspur
Common nester, often in drier tussock tundra

Brown bear
Feeds on vegetation and mammals such as ground squirrels

Savannah sparrow
Nests on sedge meadow and tussock tundra

Canada goose
Nests on wetland islands

Ruddy turnstone
Nests on open tundra and along rivers

Snow goose
Gathers on tussock tundra in great numbers to fatten on cottongrass

Musk-ox
Feeds on riverside vegetation

Greater scaup
Feeds in coastal lagoons on insects, mollusks and crustaceans

Oldsquaw
After nesting on tundra, gathers in great numbers on coastal lagoons to molt and feed

Arctic char
Spawns in coastal rivers and springs

Surf scoter
Feeds on mollusks and crustaceans in coastal lagoons

Black guillemot
Nests on coastal beaches and barrier islands

King eider
After nesting, gathers on coastal lagoons to molt and feed

Arctic cisco
Migrates through coastal lagoons