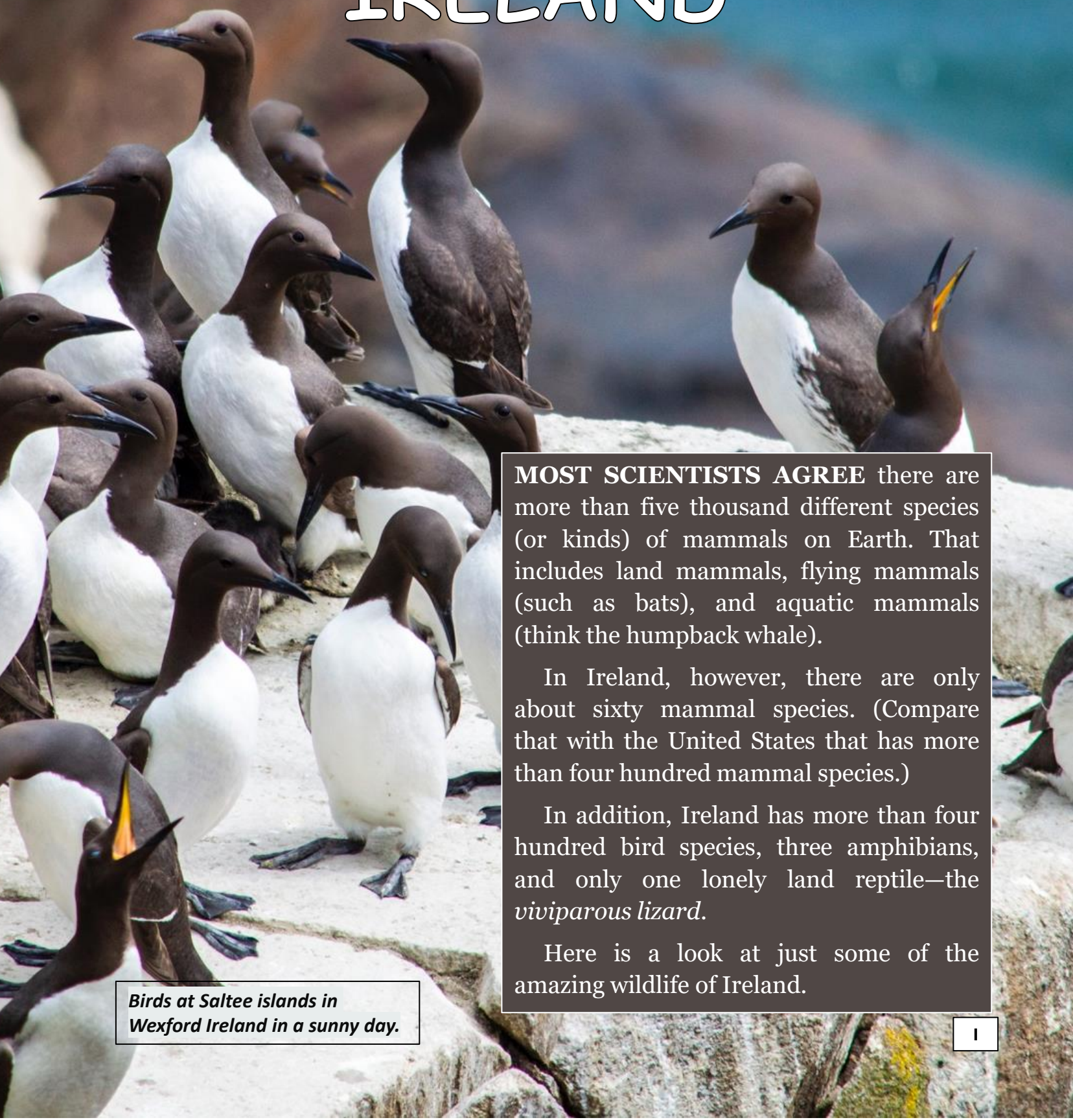


Curious Kids Press

The Wildlife of IRELAND



MOST SCIENTISTS AGREE there are more than five thousand different species (or kinds) of mammals on Earth. That includes land mammals, flying mammals (such as bats), and aquatic mammals (think the humpback whale).

In Ireland, however, there are only about sixty mammal species. (Compare that with the United States that has more than four hundred mammal species.)

In addition, Ireland has more than four hundred bird species, three amphibians, and only one lonely land reptile—the *viviparous lizard*.

Here is a look at just some of the amazing wildlife of Ireland.

Birds at Saltee islands in Wexford Ireland in a sunny day.

♥ Irish Sheep



The Irish ♥ Sheep

So much so that the sheep is as much a symbol of Ireland as the shamrock or the potato.

Some people say there are more sheep on the island of Ireland than people. That's probably not true, but there are certainly a lot of them—sheep, that is, nearly four million in the Republic of Ireland alone, according to a 2019 census.

There are many different kinds (or breeds) of sheep in Ireland. The most common breed is the **blackface mountain sheep**. You can easily spot this breed because of its black head and legs. They have long fleeces (coats of wool covering their bodies) and curved horns.

This breed was brought to Ireland from Scotland years ago. They are exceptionally hardy creatures, able to withstand the long, cold, dark and stormy winter months in Ireland.

The Galway sheep is another famous breed in Ireland. The Galway got its start in western Ireland.

They're a huge white-faced "polled" sheep (sheep without horns). They have a distinctive bob of wool on the head and wool on the legs. They also can be spotted by the dark marks on their ears and dark spots on the outer lips.

Some Irish farmers paint the backs of their sheep with a stripe of usually blue or red paint. This makes it easier for farmers to identify their sheep in case they escape or are stolen by other farmers.

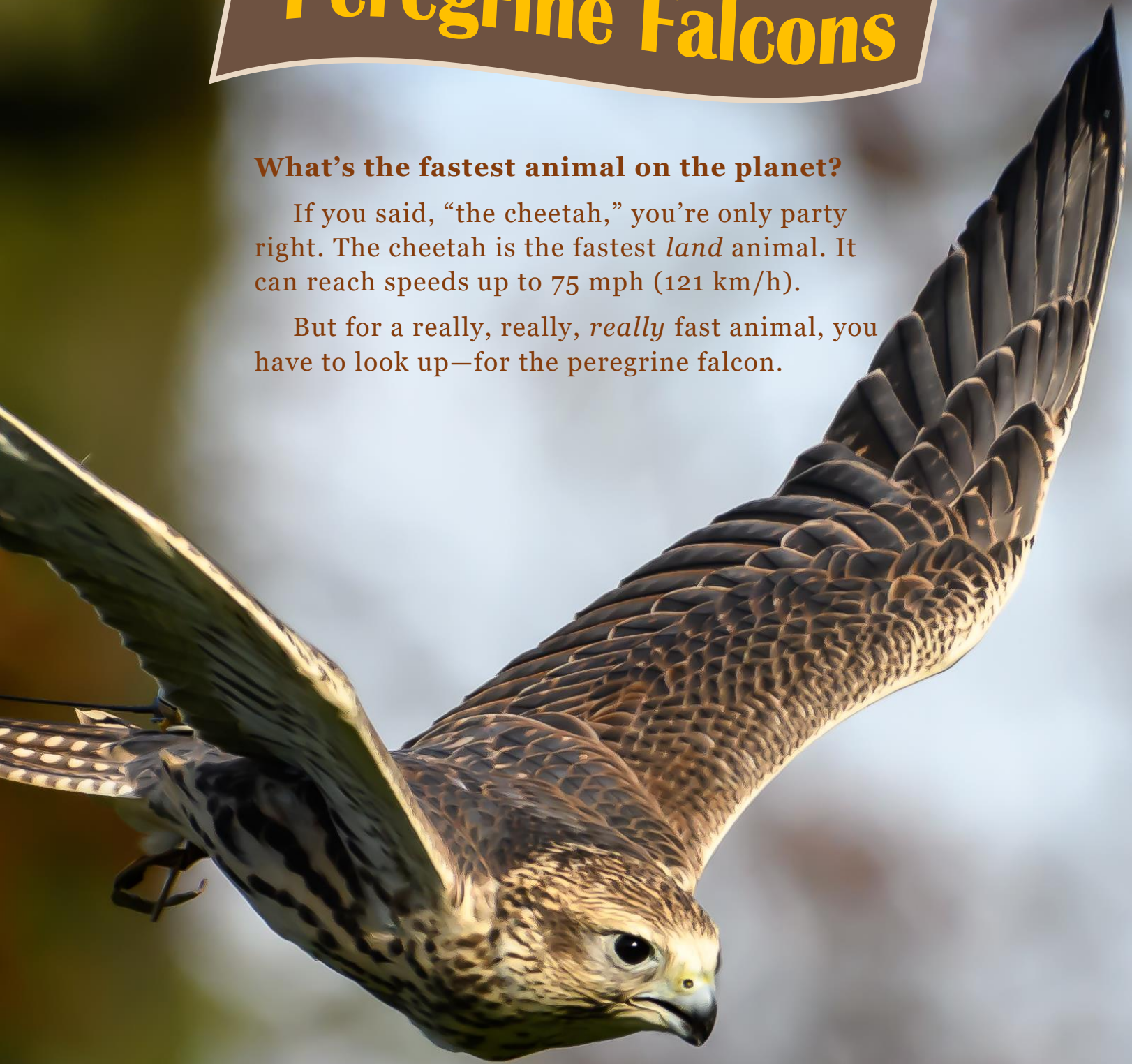


Peregrine Falcons

What's the fastest animal on the planet?

If you said, “the cheetah,” you’re only partly right. The cheetah is the fastest *land* animal. It can reach speeds up to 75 mph (121 km/h).

But for a really, really, *really* fast animal, you have to look up—for the peregrine falcon.



Some say the peregrine can reach a speed of up to 200 mph (320 kph) when it dives toward its prey—other birds in the air.

Peregrine falcons can be found on every continent except Antarctica. In the past, they were found mostly in remote rocky cliffs and wide-open spaces.

But recently, they've moved to the cities where tall buildings and towers are perfect for nesting and keeping an eye out for prey, such as pigeons—their favorite.

PEREGRINE FALCON

At a Glance

Length: 17 ½ inches (45 cm).

Wingspan: 3.3 to 3.6 feet (about 1 meter)

Weight: 18.8 to 56.5 ounces

Lifespan: Up to 17 years in the wild

Diet: Carnivore.

Other: There is an estimated 265 breeding pairs in the Republic of Ireland.



Irish Hare



Ireland doesn't have an official national animal. But if it did, chances are it would be the **Irish hare**.

That's because the Irish hare is one of the few mammals that are native to Ireland. A native plant or animal is one that has always been a part of a particular area. No human brought the plant or animal to the area.

Hares are much larger than rabbits. They have long back legs with very big feet. But there are other differences as well. (See box next page.) They are also nocturnal. That means they are mainly active at night.

In spring, hares often form large groups and can be seen boxing, kicking and leaping around with males fighting over females. Not to worry. They are just "dating" and picking partners for the mating season.

IRISH HARE

At a Glance

Type: Mammal

Weight: 3-12 lbs (1-5.5 kg).

Length: 16 to 28 inches (40-71 cm) from head to tail.

Habitat: Dense vegetation, open fields.

Diet: Herbivore (loves grass).

Predators: Owl, hawk, coyote.

Lifespan: 2-8 years.

Conservation Status: Near threatened.

Other: The male is called a “jack”; the female a “jill.” Don’t ask us why.

Hare or Rabbit?

What’s the Difference?

They look alike—sort of. But there are differences between a hare and a rabbit. Here are four main differences.

1. Hares have larger ears (8 inches tall)
2. Hares are “loners” as opposed to rabbits that are very social creatures and live in groups.
3. Hares usually give birth to their young above ground; rabbits give birth in burrows.
4. Hares are faster runners.



Fastest Animals on the Planet

With a speed of more than 40 mph (64 KM/H), the hare ranks as one of the top ten fastest animals on Earth.

Red Deer

The **red deer** is the fourth-largest species of deer in the world, after the moose, elk, and sambar deer.

But it is Ireland's largest land animal. The red deer has been roaming around Ireland for more than 12,000 years.



RED DEER

At a Glance

Length: Male (stag), 69 to 98 inches (175 to 250 cm) from the nose to the base of the tail; the female (hind), 63 to 83 inches (160 to 210 cm).

Weight: Male, 350 to 530 lb (160 to 240 kg); female, 260 to 370 lb (120 to 170 kg).

Height: Male, about 5 feet (1.5 m) at the shoulder; female, about 3 feet (1 m) at the shoulder.

Length: Male, up to 6.5 feet (2 m); female, up to 5 feet (1.5 m).

Diet: Herbivores (grass, herbs, tree shoots, acorns and fruits).

Lifespan: 10 to 13 years in the wild; 20 years in in captivity

Predators: Grey wolf, humans.

Other: Antlers are grown only by males, who shed and regrow antlers each year.

Red Fox

The **red fox** is **common** throughout Ireland in both rural and urban habitats. But don't expect to ever see one. They usually come out only at night and are elusive (hard to find). They generally try to avoid people.

These cute little guys look a little like a small dog. They have reddish fur with a long bushy tail often with a white tip.

They are also great "athletes." They run up to 31 mph (50 kph) jump over 6 ft (1.8 m) high fences. They also have superior hearing.

And, no, they don't make good pets. They're meant to live in the wild.



RED FOX

At a Glance

Weight: Up to about 15 lbs (7 kg).

Length: About 3 feet (1 meter).

Habitat: Woodlands.

Diet: Carnivores (rabbits, young hares, rats, mice, and nesting birds).

Lifespan: Up to 14 years (less in the wild).

Other: Males are known as dogs; females as vixens.

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