

• ANIMALS ILLUSTRATED •

# Arctic Fox

by Brian Koonoo • illustrated by Joseph Starkey





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# The Arctic Fox

The Arctic fox is found throughout the Arctic, above the treeline in polar regions of the world. They are found on the tundra and on the sea ice, depending on the season. During winter, they are found close to the sea ice or on the sea ice. They have small, round ears, a very furry tail, and short legs. Their fur is almost pure white in winter and mostly brown in summer.

Arctic foxes weigh between 7 and 17 pounds (3 to 7.7 kilograms), and measure about 2.5 to 3.5 feet in length (76 to 107 centimetres). Males are usually larger than females.

Let's learn more about Arctic foxes!





# Range

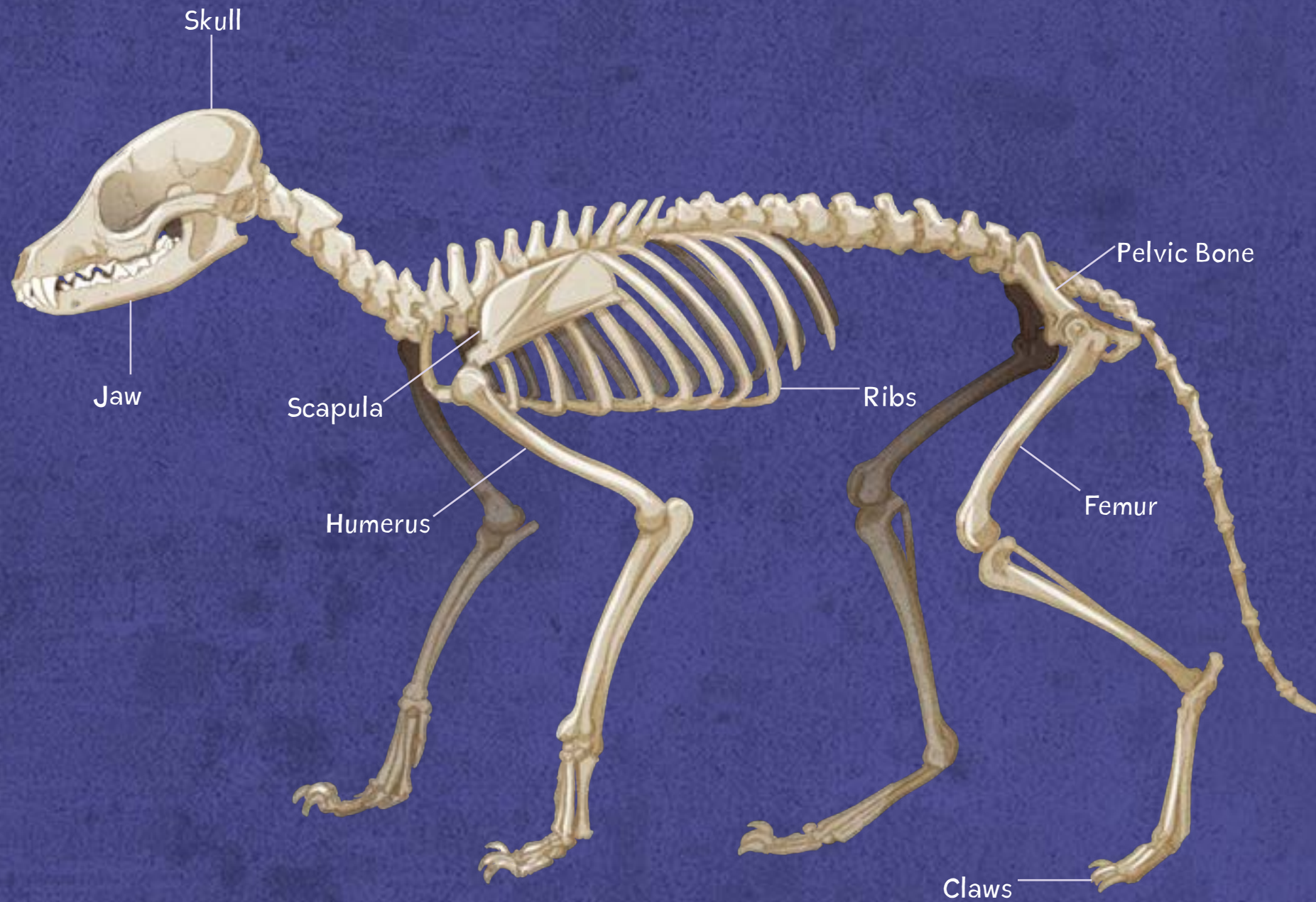
Arctic foxes are found around the world, in all polar regions, including the Canadian Arctic, Greenland, Iceland, and Arctic Europe. They are more plentiful in areas where there are lots of lemmings, one of their main food sources, and around the bodies of dead whales, another one of their food sources.

An Arctic fox has a home range that spans about 15 square miles (24 kilometres). In wintertime, they are more commonly found on the sea ice.





# Skeleton





# Claws

Arctic foxes are very skilled diggers! Their claws and paws are built for digging in both dirt and snow. Female Arctic foxes dig dens for their babies that can be up to 11 feet (about 3.4 metres) below the surface of the ground, with dozens of entrances.



Claw



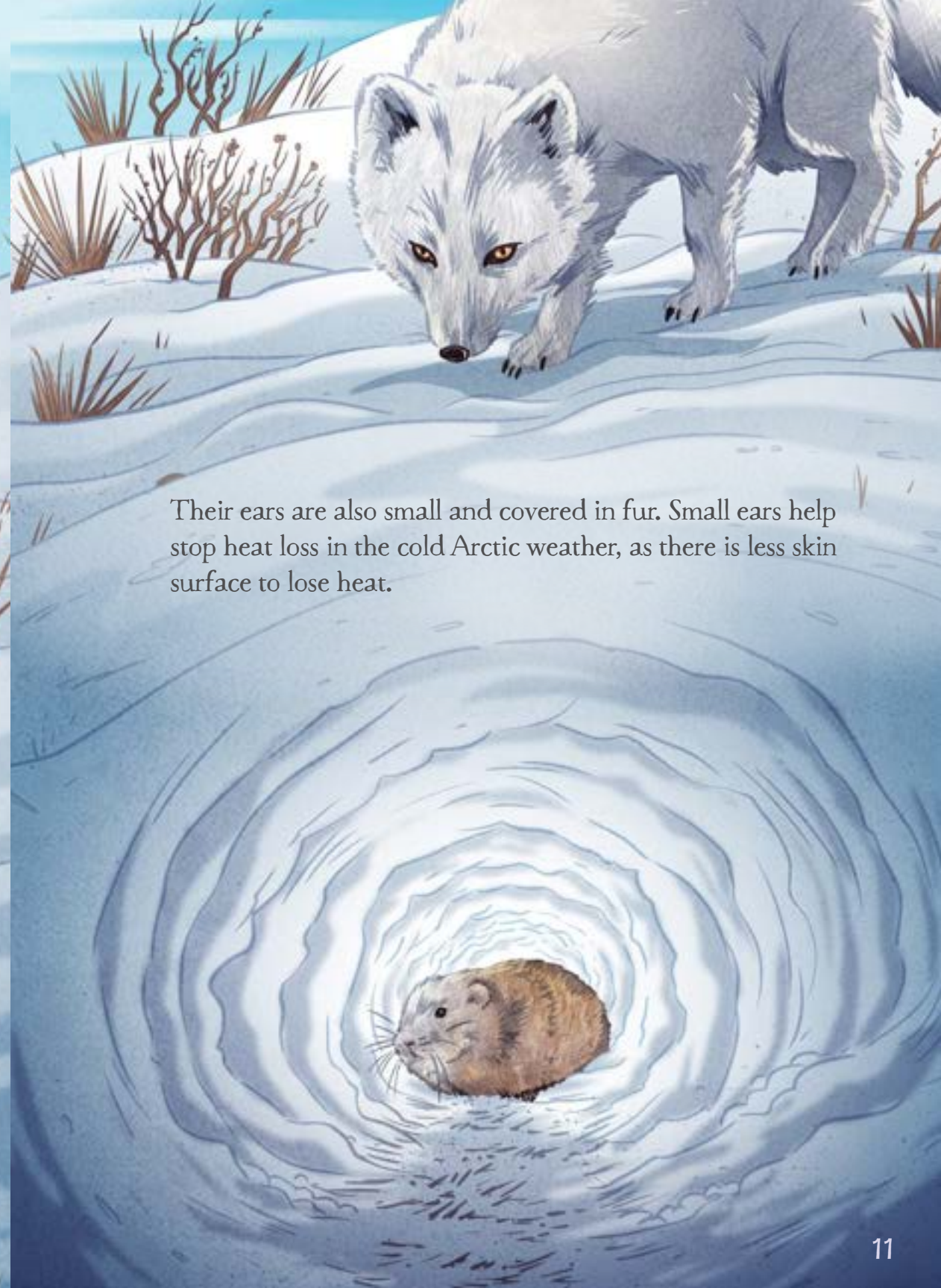
An Arctic fox can pinpoint the exact location of a lemming under the snow and jump down with its front paws, digging very fast to snatch its prey. They also hunt ringed seal pups in late March and April. Foxes quickly dig into seal dens to catch the pups.





# Ears

Arctic fox ears are built for hunting in cold Arctic temperatures. They have an excellent sense of hearing, using their keen senses to hear lemmings hiding in the subnivean space, the space between the ground and the snow.



Their ears are also small and covered in fur. Small ears help stop heat loss in the cold Arctic weather, as there is less skin surface to lose heat.



# Diet

Arctic foxes mainly eat lemmings, ringed seal pups, Arctic hares, birds, and eggs. They are hunters, but they also scavenge, meaning they eat the leftovers of another animal's hunt. They often follow polar bears to eat the leftovers of their seal hunts. During times when food is scarce, Arctic foxes may even eat insects, animal droppings, or berries.



Lemming

Arctic Hare

Arctic foxes use their strong senses of hearing and smell when hunting. They can smell a carcass (a dead animal) from more than 30 miles away (about 48 kilometres). While they don't hunt seals at breathing holes themselves, Arctic foxes will mark seal breathing holes on the ice with their pee and droppings! They do this so that polar bears or human hunters may more easily find the breathing holes and provide the fox with a carcass to scavenge.



Ringed Seal



# Babies

Arctic fox babies are usually called “kits.” They can also be called “pups” or “whelps.” Babies are usually born from late May to early June inside dens close to the banks of lakes and rivers. Arctic foxes usually den where there is less snow.

From 11 to 16 babies are born in a litter. That is the largest litter size of any animal in the world! The babies stay with their mother in the den for about 3.5 months. They drink only their mother’s milk for about the first 5 or 6 weeks, then they eat the meat that their parents bring to them.





# Predators

Arctic foxes are hunted by many other animals on the tundra. They are commonly hunted by wolves and red foxes. In the southern parts of their range they may be hunted by golden eagles and grizzly bears. Grizzly bears are known to dig into fox dens to prey on the foxes inside.



Arctic Wolf



Red Fox



Grizzly Bear



Golden Eagle



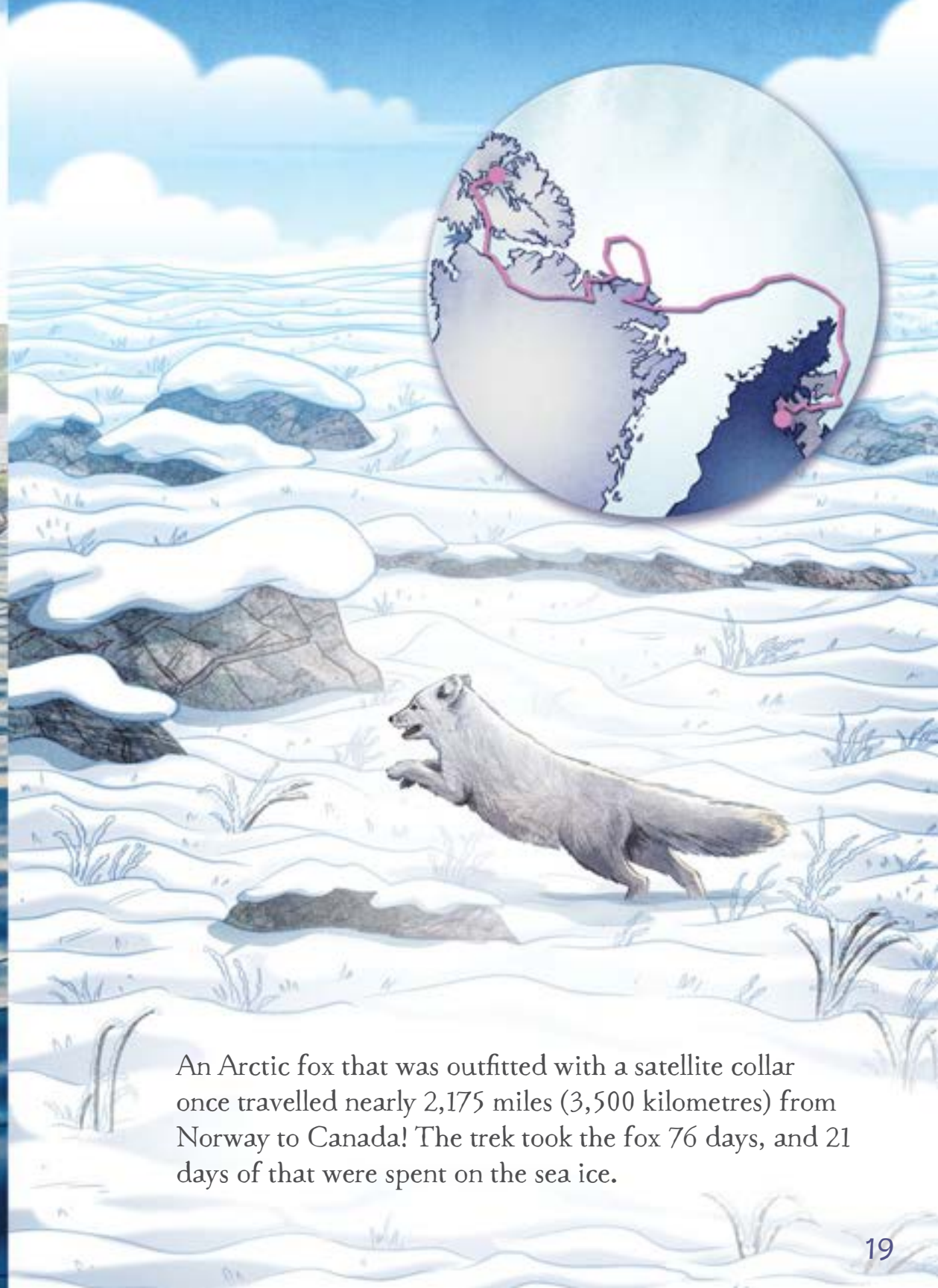
The Arctic fox's main defense against predators is their camouflage. In the winter, their white fur blends in with the snowy landscape, while in the summer their brown fur blends in with the tundra and their rocky surroundings. They are also very quick, and will crawl under boulders, into caves, and under ice ridges to get away from predators.





# Fun Facts

Arctic foxes will travel very long distances, by many different means, in order to find food. They are excellent swimmers and can even swim between islands to find food or escape predators!



An Arctic fox that was outfitted with a satellite collar once travelled nearly 2,175 miles (3,500 kilometres) from Norway to Canada! The trek took the fox 76 days, and 21 days of that were spent on the sea ice.



# Traditional Uses

Arctic fox fur is used to trim parkas and line hats. It was also traditionally used around the waist of clothing to add warmth, as the fur is very warm.



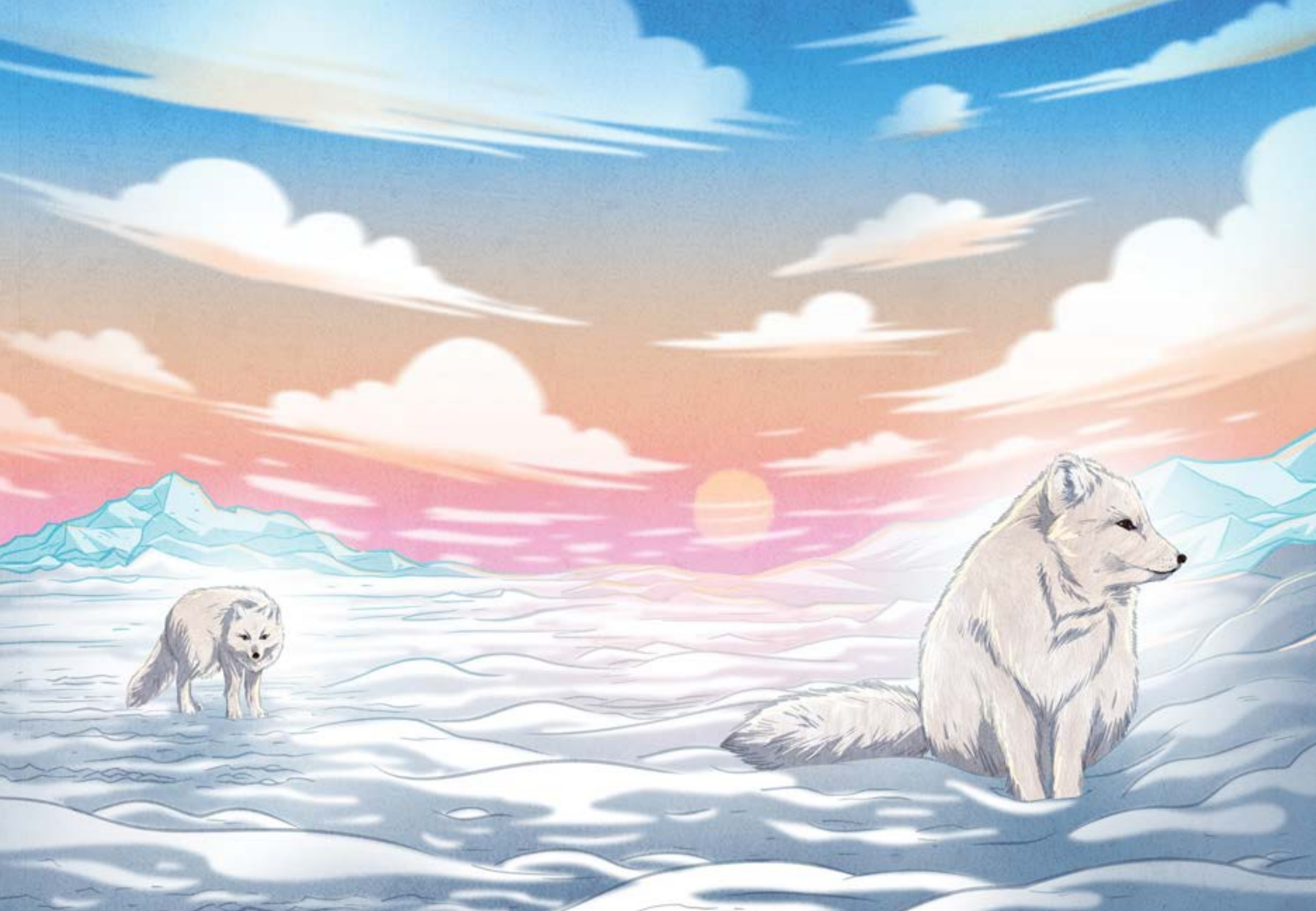
Tendons

Tendons from the tail of the Arctic fox were traditionally used as sewing threads. The meat was not usually eaten by Inuit, but could be used as dog food.

From the 1940s to the 1970s, Arctic fox trapping was the main source of income for many Inuit.









**Brian Koonoo** was born and grew up in Pond Inlet. He is married to Samantha Koonoo, originally from Rankin Inlet. They have six daughters at home: Chantal, Janelle, Josephina, Shanelle, Alina, and Alaira. Chantal and her partner Curtis have a son named Rogan, who is Brian and Samantha's first grandson and the first boy in the family. Brian currently works with Parks Canada as a resource management officer. Brian continues to hunt and provides country food for his family, relatives, and community.

**Joseph Starkey** was born in Northern Ontario and currently works as the art director and cartoonist for *Exclaim!*, Canada's premier music magazine. When he's not illustrating educational books or art directing he can be found life drawing or oil painting in the beautiful outdoors of the Bruce Peninsula.

