

The Lemming and the Snowy Owl Name _____

The lemming is a small, grayish rodent that spends its life eating mosses and lichens on the ground or under the cover of snow in the Arctic. The lemming is one of the most important of Arctic animals because it forms the basis of important Arctic food chains. Populations of Arctic predators such as snowy owls, skuas, and arctic foxes rise and fall depending on the availability of lemmings.

The snowy owl is one of the largest and most powerful owls on earth. These owls are well-adapted for life in the Arctic. Adults can approach two and a half feet in length and are almost entirely white. Younger individuals may be speckled with brown or black. Snowy owls have powerful talons covered with thick feathers for insulation. The most striking features of the owls, however, may be their large, yellow eyes.

When lemmings are plentiful in the Arctic, Snowy Owls have better success in nesting because there is enough food for all nestlings. In years when snowy owl nests are successful, hundreds or thousands of young snowy owls migrate south during the winter into southern Canada and the northern United States to establish their own hunting territories. These movements, which are thought to occur every four years or so, are referred to as irruptions.

In recent irruptions, snowy owls have been recorded as far south as Oklahoma and the Carolinas. Because there are few, if any, trees in the Arctic, snowy owls frequent airport runways, golf courses, beaches, dunes, and open areas that bear some resemblance to arctic terrain. Snowy owl sightings in the United States quickly spread through the internet, often attracting hundreds of birdwatchers and photographers to a single location.

1. Why is the lemming so important in the Arctic?

- A. Because they are important predators
- B. Because several predators depend on them for food
- C. Because their populations rise and fall
- D. Because it is a rodent

2. Which of the following would be unusual?

- A. Seeing a snowy owl near an airport runway
- B. Seeing a snowy owl atop a sand dune
- C. Seeing a snowy owl during the winter in southern Canada
- D. Seeing a snowy owl in a treetop

3. Why do young snowy owls migrate south?

- A. To establish their own hunting territories
- B. To escape the cold
- C. To chase prey
- D. To find mates

4. Which best describes an irruption?

- A. When populations of snowy owls or other animals decline during the winter
- B. When populations of snowy owls or other animals become dependent on lemmings
- C. When populations of snowy owls migrate south in great numbers during the winter
- D. When snowy owls or other birds have successful nesting seasons

5. What impact does the internet have on birdwatchers hoping to see a snowy owl?

- A. Birdwatchers can learn about the snowy owl by reading about it on the internet.
- B. Birdwatchers can see a map that shows where snowy owls nest
- C. Birdwatchers can learn about locations where snowy owls have been recently sighted
- D. Birdwatchers can find out how to attract snowy owls to their yards

6. Which of the following fact BEST supports the following?

These owls are well-adapted for life in the Arctic.

- A. The snowy owl has powerful talons
- B. The snowy owl preys on lemmings
- C. The snowy owl has thick feathers on its talons for insulation
- D. The snowy owl may migrate south in the winter

7. Which of the following IS NOT true about Snowy Owls?

- A. Snowy owl adults have black or brown speckles and young snowy owls are almost totally white
- B. Snowy owls have been observed in states as far south as North Carolina and Oklahoma
- C. Successful nesting among snowy owls is dependent upon populations of lemmings
- D. Snowy owls have large, yellow eyes