**Tundra**

It is crazy cold in the Arctic tundra. It’s so cold that the ground is frozen most of the year, and a deep layer of soil below the surface—called the permafrost—never melts at all. However, for two months during the summer, the temperature rises above freezing. The snow and surface soil melt, creating big pools of water and bogs.

During this brief summer season, plants have a chance to grow. But due to the harsh conditions and high winds, tundra plants grow very low to the ground. In fact, the tundra is a treeless landscape.

Historically, the tundra covered about 15 percent of the Earth’s land surface. However, scientists estimate that the tundra has shrunk by almost 20 percent over the last 20 years due to climate change. In the southern part of the tundra, parts of the permafrost have melted. Trees now dot the landscape, and animals from warmer climates are moving in.

*The tundra is a rocky landscape. Lichen—a combination of fungi and algae—grow on the rocks. Lichens are a favorite food of reindeer that migrate across the tundra in vast herds. During winter, these lichens are one of the only foods available and reindeer will dig through snow to find them.* 