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Climate and nature

Most of Europe has a 'temperate' climate – neither too hot nor too cold. The coldest places are in the far north and in the high mountains.

The warmest places are in the far south and south-east. The weather is warmest and driest in summer (roughly June to September) and coldest in winter (roughly December to March).

Europe had record-breaking hot summers in 2003 and 2006. Is this a sign that the climate is changing? Climate change is a world-wide problem that can only be solved if all countries work together.

Coping with the winter

Wild animals in cold regions usually have thick fur or feathers to keep them warm, and their coats may be white to camouflage them in the snow. Some spend the winter sleeping to save energy. This is called hibernating.



The Arctic fox ...



... and snowy owl are well camouflaged



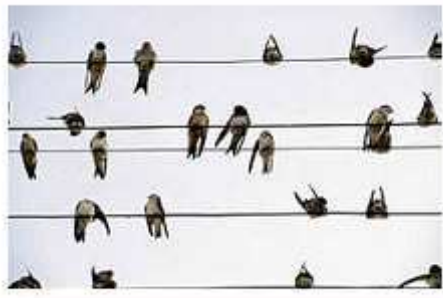
The marmot ...



... and European brown bears live in the mountains, where they spend the winter sleeping



Many species of birds live on insects, small water creatures or other food that cannot easily be found during cold winter months. So they fly south in the autumn and don't return until spring. Some travel thousands of kilometres, across the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert, to spend the winter in Africa. This seasonal travelling is called migrating.



Swallows ...



... and even flamingos come to Europe in spring

Enjoying the spring and summer

When spring comes to Europe (March to May), the weather gets warmer. Snow and ice melt. Baby fish and insect larvae swarm in the streams and ponds. Migrating birds return to make their nests and raise their families. Flowers open, and bees carry pollen from one plant to another.



Trees put out new leaves which catch the sunlight and use its energy to make the tree grow. In mountain regions, farmers move their cows up into the high meadows, where there is now plenty of fresh grass.



Cold-blooded animals such as reptiles also need the sun to give them energy. In summer, especially in southern Europe, you will often see lizards basking in the sunshine and hear the chirping of grasshoppers and cicadas.





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Climate and nature

Autumn: a time of change



Wasps love fruit too!

In late summer and autumn, the days grow shorter and the nights cooler. Many delicious fruits ripen at this time of year, and farmers are kept busy harvesting them.

Nuts too ripen in autumn, and squirrels will gather and store heaps of them ready for the winter.



Squirrels store nuts for their winter food

Many trees shed their leaves in autumn because there is no longer enough sunshine for the leaves to be useful. They gradually change from green to shades of yellow, red, gold and brown. Then they fall, carpeting the ground with colour. The fallen leaves decay, enriching the soil and providing food for future generations of plant life.



This yearly cycle of the seasons, and the changes it brings, make the European countryside what it is – beautiful, and very varied.

Test yourself
now!



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