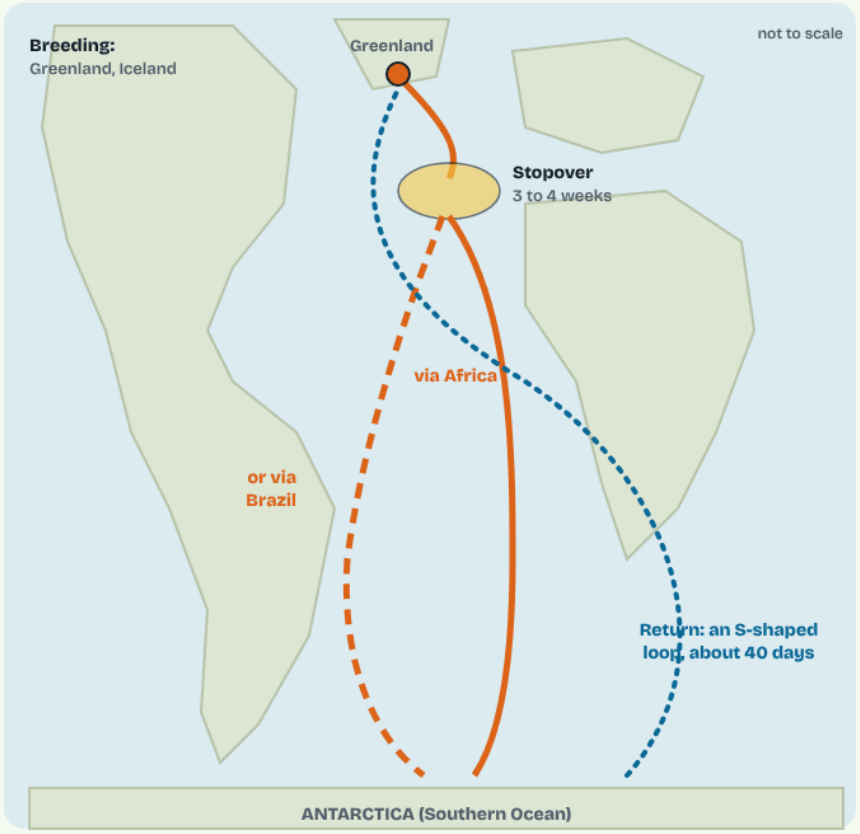
That is why

How far do Arctic terns migrate?

About 70,000 km a year, from Arctic summer to Antarctic summer and back: the longest migration known for any animal.

A The route (schematic map)



B The numbers

70,000 km

a year, round trip;
some fly over 80,000 km

2.4 million

km in a lifetime: about three trips to the Moon and back

under 125 g

body weight, about as much as a small apple

How we know

In 2010, scientists fitted 11 terns with geolocators weighing 1.4 g and followed them for a year. The trackers revealed the mid-Atlantic stopover for the first time.

C Why fly so far?

1 Two summers a year

They spend the northern summer in the Arctic, then the southern summer in the Southern Ocean.

2 Chasing daylight

Near-constant daylight at both ends of the trip.

3 Riding the wind

The winding route home follows favourable winds, saving energy.

A bird lighter than an apple, flying the length of the planet every year.

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Diagram: https://thatiswhy.com/diagrams/why-arctic-terns-migrate-pole-to-pole/ · Full guide: https://thatiswhy.com/why-arctic-terns-can-fly-pole-to-pole/