

Desert Creatures

Deserts are found all over the world. They form in places where the air is very dry and there are few clouds. Because there are no clouds, there is no rain and deserts are very dry. Deserts can be hot or cold. Often deserts are very hot during the day but cool at night. Many desert animals hide under the ground while it is really hot and come out to eat as it starts to get dark. Deserts are not easy places for animals to live. Animals who live in them often have special features that help them survive. For example, camels can drink a lot of water at a time and then go for a long time with no water.

There are fewer plants in desert habitats than in other places, so most animals eat other creatures to live. The list of who eats who is called a food chain. At the top of the food chain is an animal that is too fast, big or strong to be attacked. An example in the desert is a large black mamba snake.



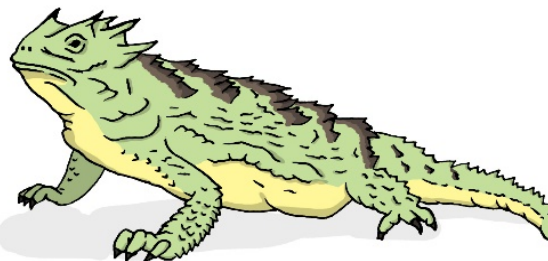
This is a coyote. Coyotes hunt rabbits, mice and other animals at night. During the night, coyotes can often be heard howling in the desert. Coyotes live in burrows in the ground during the daytime.



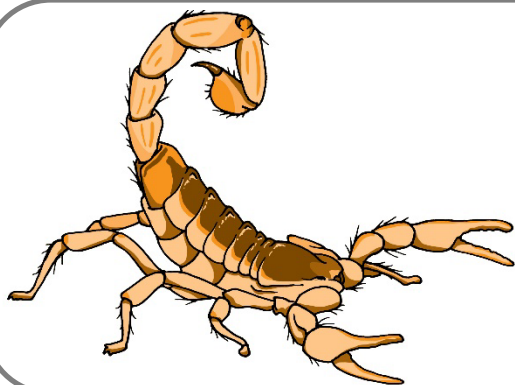
This is a Gila monster. It is a large desert lizard that can go for a long time without eating. This is because they are able to store fat as food in their tails. Gila monsters eat small desert animals and their eggs.



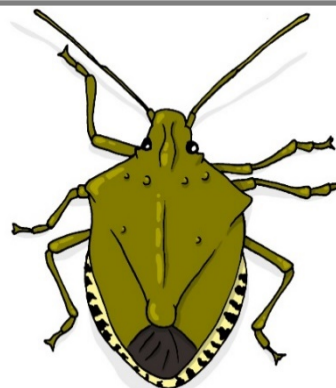
This is a red-tailed hawk. It is a skilful predator at the top of the food chain. It hunts other animals that live in the desert. The hawk might eat rabbits, mice, snakes and even other birds. It mainly lives in the USA and Canada.



This is a Texas horned lizard. If it senses danger, it stops and lies flat and very still on the ground. It is really well camouflaged and difficult to spot when it does this. The lizard's spots and spikes blend into the rocky sand.



This is a scorpion. It is an arachnid and has eight legs. It has armour to protect itself and uses a dangerous stinger as a weapon. The stinger contains a powerful poison. Its prey includes millipedes, insects and even lizards. The scorpion uses its pincer claws to grab its prey before stinging.



This is a stinkbug. It lives in the ground and on rocks. If it is scared, it will spray a nasty smelling liquid at its enemy. It may also stand on its head.

Stinkbugs live all over the world but some varieties have adapted to life in the desert.



This is a desert tarantula. It is a spider or arachnid. It stays underground to keep cool. Desert tarantulas spin silk to fill their nests.

It comes out at night to hunt. Its diet includes insects and mice. The tarantula can live for about ten years.

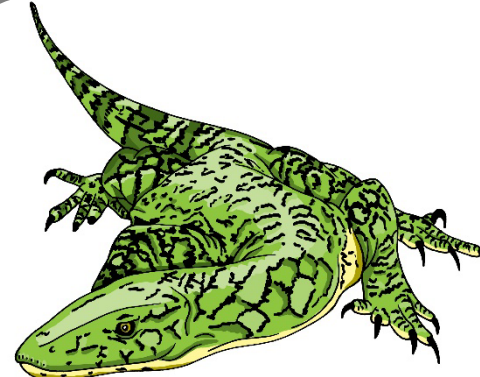


This is a burrowing owl. It nests and sleeps in underground burrows. It often comes out during the day and stands in front of the burrow. Burrowing owls eat small mammals such as moles and mice during late spring and early summer. Later they switch to insects, especially grasshoppers and beetles.



This is a cactus mouse. It makes burrows in the sand of the Mojave desert in the USA. It climbs up cacti to escape predators.

Cactus mice survive on very little water, getting the liquid they need from the fruit and plants they eat.



This is perentie. It is a lizard that grows up to 2m in length. It has a very varied diet, from birds' eggs to kangaroos. It swims, climbs trees and runs on two or four legs.

It has no predators so can live for 20 years.



This is a cactus wren. It makes its nest inside a cactus, which helps it to stay safe. It eats insects like ants and beetles. It also predares the nests of other birds and eats their eggs.



This is a termite. It lives in massive, tall mounds in the desert. The mounds have lots of underground tunnels which can be home to millions of termites. The main diet of termites is mostly dead plants so they are near the bottom of the food chain.



This is a jackal, a kind of wild dog. It is a really fast hunter and will eat any creature it is able to catch, including meerkats. A jackal will also scavenge dead animals. As it is so fast and strong, few other animals will dare to attack a jackal.



This is a meerkat. Meerkats live and hunt in large groups. At night they stay underground in burrows linked by tunnels. When they are feeding, the meerkats take turns to be a lookout for dangerous predators such as eagles or snakes. The meerkat eats insects and scorpions.

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Complete this table with ✓. (AF2)

Name of creature	bird	insect/arachnid	mammal	reptile
cactus wren				
stinkbug				
desert tarantula				
burrowing owl				
cactus mouse				
Texas horned lizard				
perentie				
termite				
jackal				
coyote				
Gila monster				
meerkat				
scorpion				

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Complete this table with ✓. (AF2)

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cactus wren	✓			
stinkbug		✓		
desert tarantula		✓		
burrowing owl	✓			
cactus mouse			✓	
Texas horned lizard				✓
perentie				✓
termite		✓		
jackal			✓	
coyote			✓	
Gila monster				✓
meerkat			✓	
scorpion		✓		

Desert Creatures

Why has the writer put the information in boxes? (AF4)

Why do you think nesting in a cactus helps the cactus wren stay safe? (AF3)

How is the burrowing owl different from most other owls? (AF3/AF7)

Why do so many desert creatures come out to feed at night? (AF3)

How do cactus mice survive with very little water? (AF2)

How do the meerkats work as a team to stay safe? (AF3)

Explain what the word “scavenge” means. (AF3)

How is the scorpion similar to the desert tarantula? (AF3)

Why do you think tables, like the one you have completed, are often used in non-fiction books? (AF4/AF6)

What do you think might prey on the red-tailed hawk? (AF3)

Why do you think the Gila monster has the word monster in its name? (AF3)

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Why has the writer put the information in boxes? (AF4) **To make it easier to read.**

Why do you think nesting in a cactus helps the cactus wren stay safe? (AF3) **Prickles and spikes protect it.**

How is the burrowing owl different from most other owls? (AF3/AF7) **It often comes out in the daytime.**

Why do so many desert creatures come out to feed at night? (AF3) **It is cooler at night.**

How do cactus mice survive with very little water? (AF2) **They get moisture from plants and fruits that they eat.**

How do the meerkats work as a team to stay safe? (AF3) **They take it in turns to act as lookouts when feeding.**

Explain what the word “scavenge” means. (AF3) **To feed on animals that are already dead.**

How is the scorpion similar to the desert tarantula? (AF3) **Both are arachnids.**

Why do you think tables, like the one you have completed, are often used in non-fiction books? (AF4/AF6) **They make information easy to find.**

What do you think might prey on the red-tailed hawk? (AF3) **Nothing, as it is top of the food chain.**

Why do you think the Gila monster has the word monster in its name? (AF3) **Probably because of its size.**