



Living Things

and Their Habitats

Welcome to the Desert

by Honor Head



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Words shown in **bold** in the text are explained in the glossary.



Welcome to the Desert

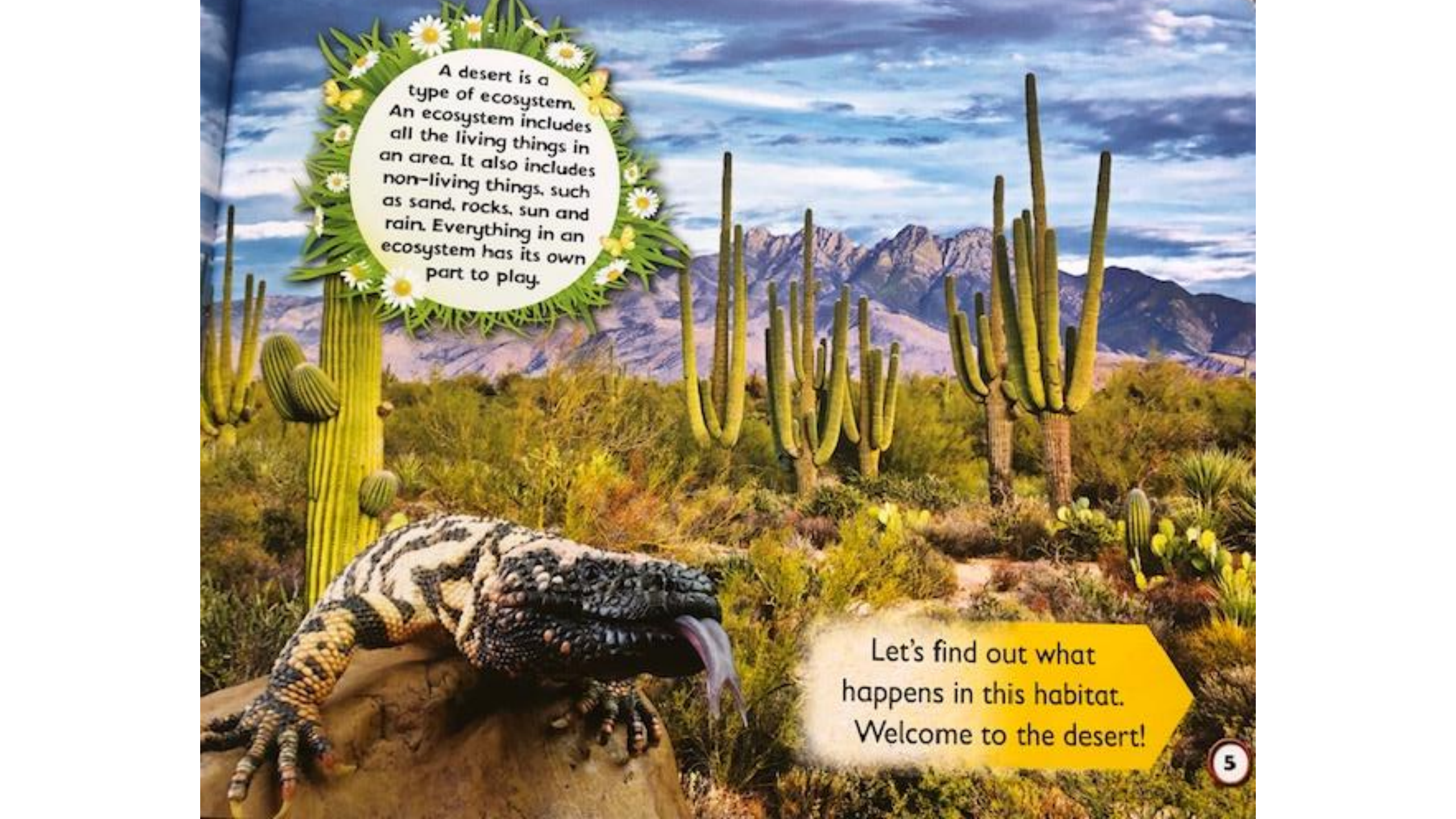
Who and what lives in the Sonoran Desert in the United States?

This hot, dry, dusty desert is home to spiky cacti and other plants.



Birds, snakes, lizards and wild cats are some of the animals that live in this **habitat**.

The plants and animals get what they need to live from the desert.

A vibrant desert scene featuring several tall saguaro cacti in the foreground and middle ground. In the background, there are rugged mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the lower-left foreground, a lizard with black and tan patterns is perched on a rock, with its tongue flicking out. A circular text box with a floral border is positioned in the upper-left area, and a yellow arrow-shaped text box is in the lower-right area.

A desert is a type of ecosystem. An ecosystem includes all the living things in an area. It also includes non-living things, such as sand, rocks, sun and rain. Everything in an ecosystem has its own part to play.

Let's find out what happens in this habitat. Welcome to the desert!

Spring in the Desert

It is spring in the Sonoran Desert.

Colourful flowers provide food for insects, birds and other animals.

Cacti also help animals in the Sonoran Desert to survive in lots of ways.

Cactus

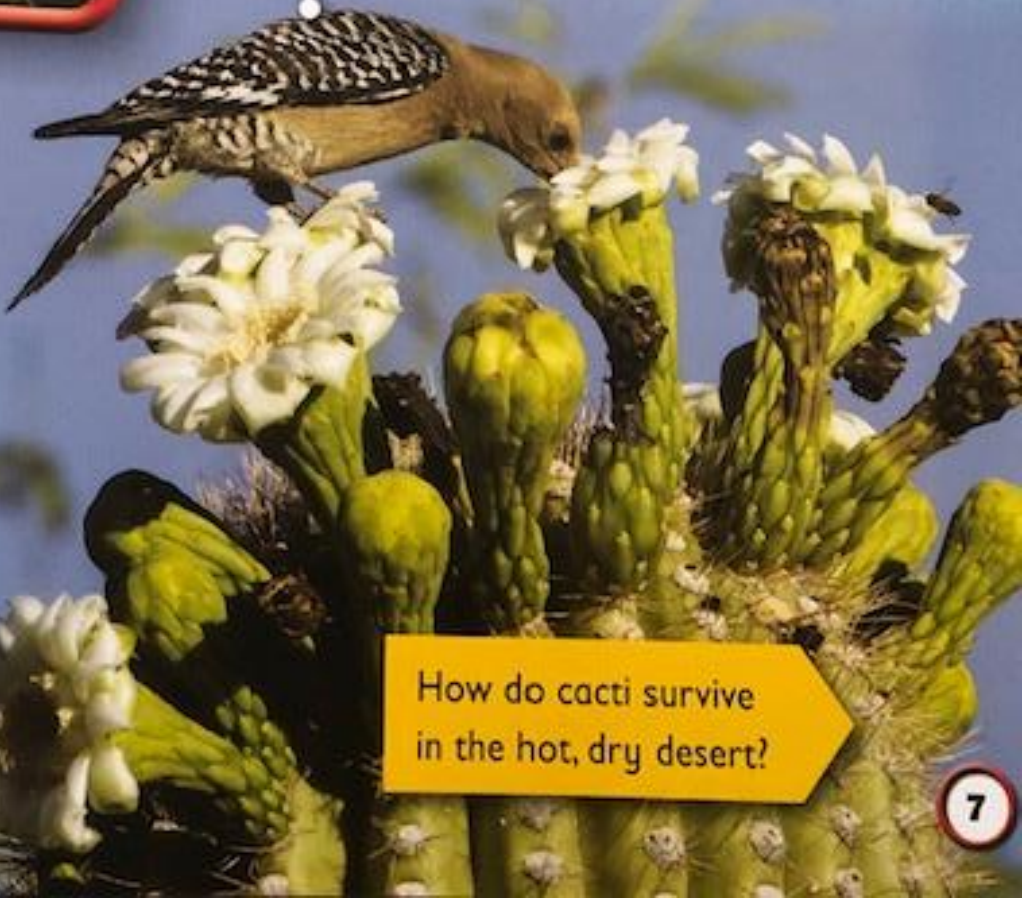
Queen butterfly



Ground squirrel

A tiny ground squirrel nibbles on a cactus flower.

Butterflies and birds drink **nectar** from cactus flowers.



Gila woodpecker



In spring and summer the Sonoran Desert is scorching hot during the day. There may be no rain for many months.

Cactus flower

How do cacti survive in the hot, dry desert?

Spiny Survivors

Cacti have **adapted** to survive in a dry desert habitat.

When it rains, a cactus's roots quickly take up lots of water.

The soft, fleshy plant expands to hold as much water as possible.

Saguaro
cactus

The plant's fat
stems are full
of water.

Some cacti
have a long, thick
taproot that grows
deep into the ground
to find water. Thinner
roots spread out near the
surface to quickly
suck up water
when it rains.

Eating the juicy stems of a cactus is a good way for animals to get water.

The plant's spines help protect its stems from hungry, thirsty animals.



This javelina is carefully eating fruit from a spiky barrel cactus.

What lives inside a hole in a saguaro cactus?


A Nest in a Saguaro Cactus

A Gila woodpecker is pecking a hole in a saguaro cactus.

The hole is a cool, safe nest where she can lay her eggs.

The woodpecker pecks away rotting, diseased bits of stem.

This helps the cactus by stopping the disease from spreading to the rest of the plant.

A photograph of a Gila woodpecker perched on a saguaro cactus. The bird is facing left, pecking at a hole in the cactus stem. The cactus is green with many small white flowers. The background is a solid blue color.

Gila woodpecker



Baby elf owl



An elf owl is the size of a coffee mug. She doesn't make her own nest hole. She raises her chicks in a hole that a woodpecker family no longer uses.



Hawk

Chick

A hawk has made a nest of sticks in a cactus.

High above the ground, her chicks will be safe from snakes and other **predators**.

What food does the hawk catch for her hungry chicks?

Watch Out!



The hawk flies high in the sky looking for food for her chicks.

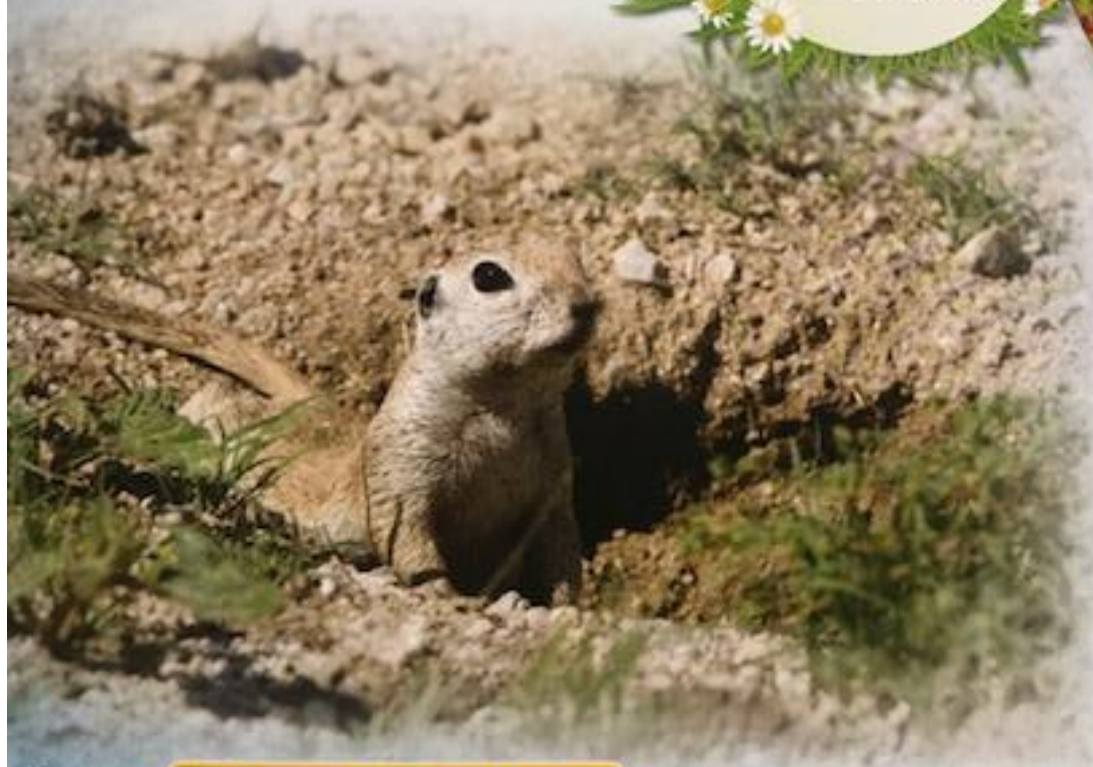
She has excellent eyesight and can spot small animals on the ground.



A family of ground squirrels is outside their **burrow**.

The ground squirrels are eating grass, leaves, flowers, fruit and seeds.

In the desert there is very little water. Ground squirrels get the water they need from the plants they eat.



Suddenly, the mother ground squirrel sees the hawk overhead.

The squirrel family dives to safety in their underground burrow.

A ground squirrel peeks out of its burrow.

Can you think of another reason why a desert animal might spend time in a burrow?

Keeping Cool

It's midday and the scorching sun beats down on the desert.

Many animals are underground where it is cool.

Desert tortoise

Desert tortoises dig burrows in the rocky soil.

When evening comes, a desert tortoise leaves its burrow to find plants to eat.

Prickly pear fruit



Gila monster

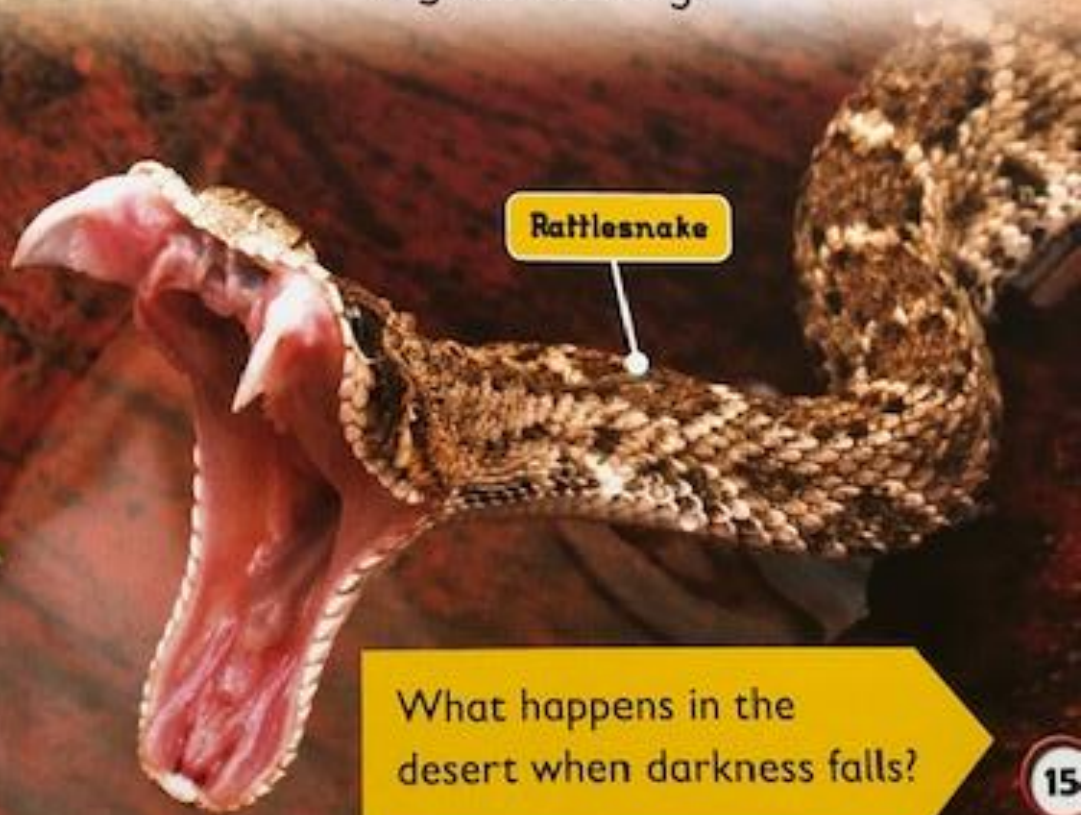
A Gila monster lizard stays cool in an old desert tortoise burrow.

A rattlesnake sleeps in the shade under some rocks.

When the air cools down, it goes hunting.



The rattlesnake hunts for small animals, such as rats and ground squirrels. It injects **venom** into its **prey** through its fangs, and then swallows its prey whole.



Rattlesnake

What happens in the desert when darkness falls?

A Busy Night

When night falls, **nocturnal** animals leave their homes to find food.

A long-nosed bat flies from its home in a cool, rocky cave.

It visits cacti and other plants to drink nectar from flowers.

As the bat feeds, **pollen** sticks to its furry face.

It carries the pollen from flower to flower, which helps the plants make seeds.





A kangaroo rat hops about looking for seeds. It carries food back to its burrow in its cheek pouches.

A long howl fills the night air. What is making that noise?

Eat It Clean!

A coyote is howling to communicate with other members of its family.

Coyotes eat almost anything!

They feed on cactus fruits, insects, small animals and even the remains of dead animals.

Coyote

Animals such as coyotes and turkey vultures help to keep the desert free from disease by eating the rotting bodies of dead animals.

This turkey vulture is eating the remains of an old javelina.

Beetles, such as the stinkbug, also feed on dead bodies and rotting plants.



If it's attacked, a stinkbug sprays its predator with a nasty smelling liquid from its bottom!

Which clever hunter has built a trap underground?

Minibeast Feast

Trapdoor

Under a trapdoor in the ground waits a tiny, eight-legged predator.

Trapdoor spider

When an insect walks near the door, the ground **vibrates**.

The trapdoor spider feels the vibrations and jumps out to grab its meal.



A scorpion grabs small animals in its pincers. It uses the venomous sting at the end of its tail to stop its prey struggling.



Sting


Scorpion

Pincer

Desert tarantula



A tarantula spider waits in its burrow.



Silk threads

Burrow

Silk threads outside the burrow vibrate when an insect walks by.

Then the tarantula jumps out and bites its prey.

How does an animal's colour help it survive in the desert?

Desert Hide and Seek

Some desert animals have **camouflage** to help them survive.

Camouflage is when an animal's colour or markings help it to blend into its habitat.

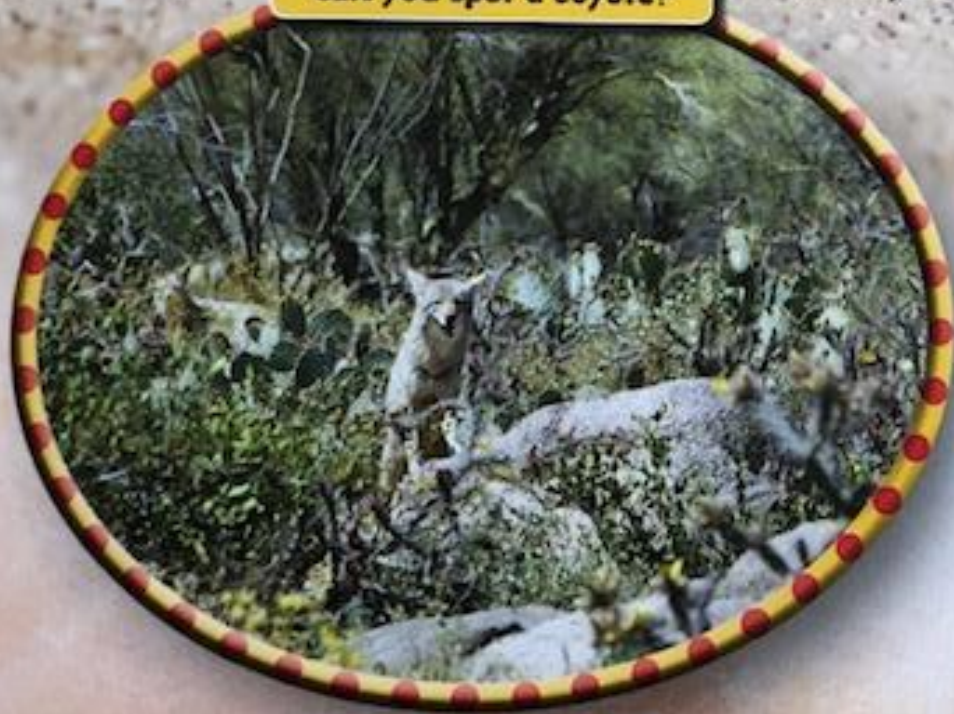
The skin colour of a regal horned lizard helps it hide from predators on the rocky ground.



Many desert animals are a sandy colour.

Baby javelinas are camouflaged to keep them safe from hunters, such as coyotes.

Can you spot a coyote?



A coyote's colour helps it to hide from its prey when it is hunting.

What does it mean when the air grows cooler and a breeze blows over the desert?

Rain, Glorious Rain!

Lightning flashes over the desert.

The **monsoon** rains have come.

Spadefoot toad



After the rains, spadefoot toads leave their underground burrows to **mate** and lay eggs in puddles and pools.

In less than a day, tadpoles hatch from the eggs.

The tadpoles change into toads in just two weeks, before the puddles dry out.



Then each tiny toad buries itself in the sand until the next rains.



Before going underground, the young toads feed on ants, beetles, grasshoppers and spiders. It may be a year before they eat their next meal!

What powerful predator lives in the mountains that tower over the desert?

Big Cats of the Desert

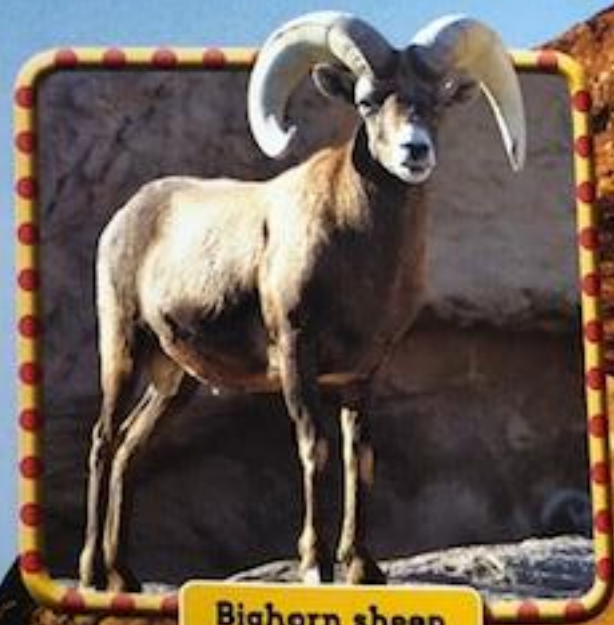
The mountains of the Sonoran Desert are home to mountain lions.



Mountain lion

They hunt large animals, such as deer, bighorn sheep and javelinas.

Mountain lions are also known as pumas or cougars. They can leap up to 12 metres in one jump.



Bighorn sheep

Mountain lion kittens have spotted coats so they are camouflaged in their den.

Their spots help hide them from coyotes when their mother is out hunting.



Mountain lion kitten



Bobcat

The desert is also home to bobcats that hunt for kangaroo rats, ground squirrels, rabbits and birds.

What happens in the desert during winter?

Winter in the Desert

When winter comes, the desert air cools down, but it is still warm during the day.

In the mountains, snow falls and it is freezing cold at night.

Some desert animals, such as tortoises and gila monsters, stay underground.



Hummingbird

In the cooler weather, birds build nests and mate.

A tiny hummingbird builds a nest of twigs, leaves and spider webs.

Dove



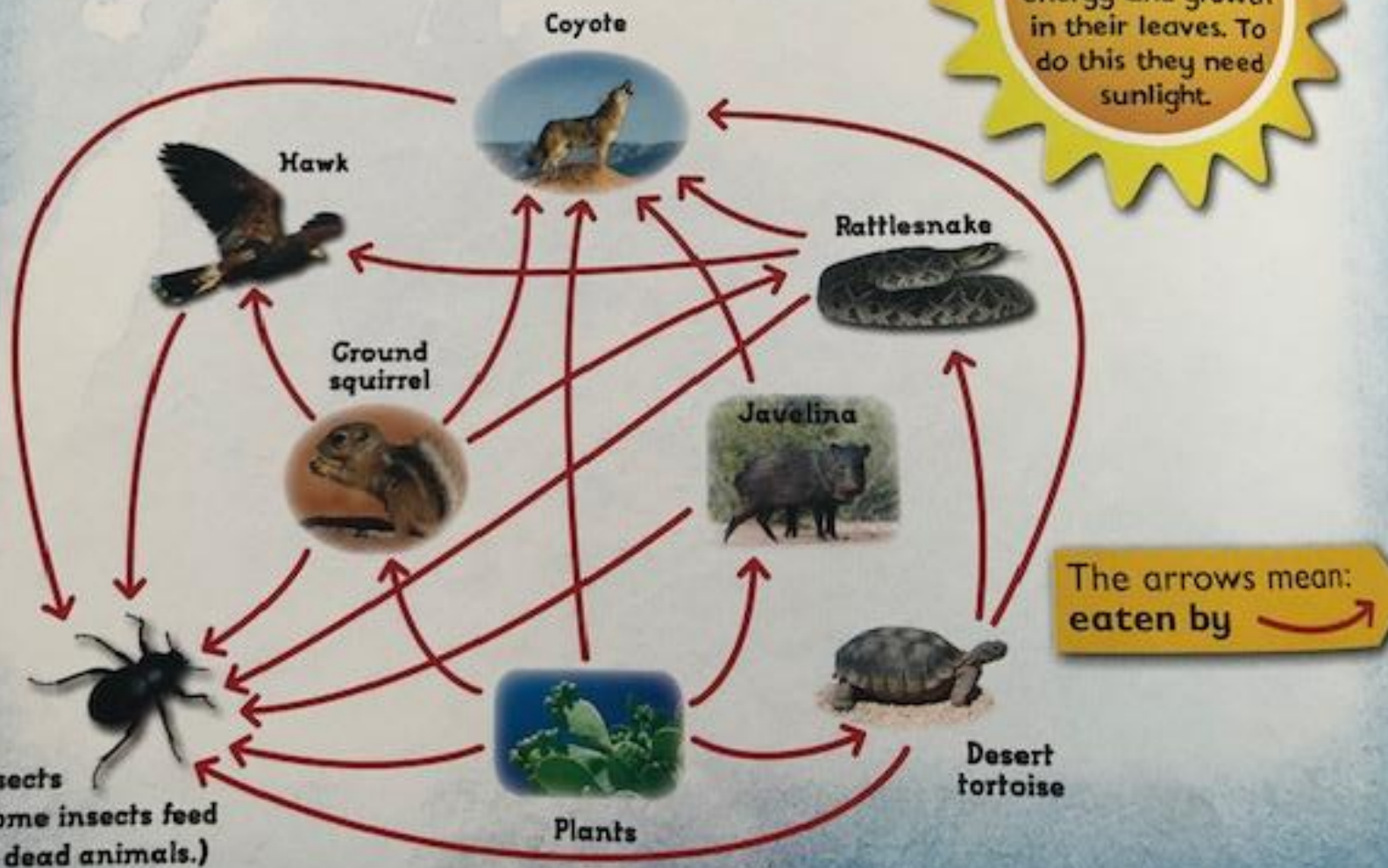
A dove finds a spot in a cactus for her nest.

Winter in the desert is short. The hot days of spring and summer will soon be back.

A Desert Food Web

A food web shows who eats who in a habitat.

This food web shows the connections between some of the living things in the Sonoran Desert.



Glossary

adapted

Changed over time to survive in a particular habitat.

burrow

A hole or tunnel that an animal digs as a home.

camouflage

Colours or markings that help an animal blend into its habitat.

habitat

The place where an animal or plant lives. Deserts, rainforests and gardens are all types of habitats.

mate

To get together to produce young.

monsoon

Very heavy rains that happen at least once a year.

nectar

A sugary liquid produced by flowers.

nocturnal

Active mainly at night.

pollen

A coloured dust that is made by flowers, and is needed for making seeds.

predator

An animal that hunts and eats other animals.

prey

An animal that is hunted by other animals for food.

venom

A type of poison that is injected into a body by a bite or sting.

vibrate

Move very quickly backward and forward.



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Learn More Online

To learn more about life in a desert, go to
www.rubytuesdaybooks.com/habitats





Welcome to the Desert

Inside this book, explore a desert and discover how all the living things that make it their home depend on each other and their habitat for survival.

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