



THE LIFE AND ADAPTATION OF DESERT PLANTS AND ANIMALS.

Link to our exhibit: "In the World: The great southwestern desert"

LIFE IN THE DESERT

Deserts are tracts of bush-covered land with much bare ground exposed and with less than 10 inches of precipitation annually. The vegetation and animals are adapted to the conditions of infrequent rains, and the habits of the animals are adjusted to help them physiologically deal with the heat and aridity. Some deserts are hot all year long, some become cold in the winter.

GAME 1: What type of animals and plants live in the desert? Use the clues below and our diorama to help you solve the riddles.

- ▶ I belong to the family of Cactaceae
- ▶ I am quite tall for a plant and people call me a "giant"
- ▶ Instead of leaves, I have spines.

😊 I am the _____

- ▶ I am a plant that lives in dry areas and that can survive long periods of drought.
- ▶ I can collect water very efficiently by storing it for long periods of time in my stem.
- ▶ My flowers produce seed-bearing fruits that resemble pears.

😊 I am the _____

- ▶ I am a bird that makes nesting holes in the stems of cacti, and changes nesting holes every year.
- ▶ I live in the extreme southwestern USA and northern Mexico.
- ▶ I eat insects but also other foods such as cactus fruits and mistletoe berries.

😊 I am the _____

- ▶ I am the Arizona State bird, and I enjoy harassing pet cats or dogs that enters my territory.
- ▶ I am the largest of my family, and I have a white stripe over my eyes and white spots on my outer tail.
- ▶ I have an unusual "chug-chug" call and use a wide vocabulary of "growl, peep, buzz, and rack" sounds to communicate.

😊 I am the _____

- ▶ I am a small mammal with white stripes on either side of my back from my shoulders to the base of my tail. When I run, my tail curls over my back, exposing the white undersurface.
- ▶ I am omnivorous, I can feed on seeds, plants, invertebrates, vertebrates, and succulent food items.
- ▶ I am an opportunistic feeder, making use of what is available.
- ▶ I live in rocky foothills from desert to low-elevation woodlands, with vegetation such as juniper.

😊 I am the _____

- ▶ I am a large, venomous lizard.
- ▶ I am carnivorous and nocturnal, which means that I eat meat and I am most active during the night.
- ▶ I can live for months without food, thanks to the fat that I can store in my tail.
- ▶ I was named after the Gila River Basin in the southwestern United States.

😊 I am the _____

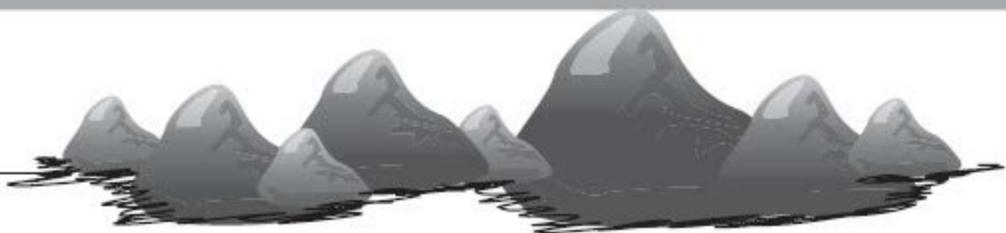
- ▶ I am a plant that can grow in many semi-arid regions of the world. I require little water and maintenance.
- ▶ I yield a crop of seeds that have many uses. The oil produced from my seeds is used in lubricants, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and in manufacturing of inks, varnishes, waxes, detergents, resins and plastics.
- ▶ I grow best in sandy soils, in decomposed granite soils, or in rocky soils.

😊 I am the _____

- ▶ I am a cold-blooded creature and my body temperature is close to that of my environment. My favorite habitat is rocky deserts.
- ▶ I am largely carnivorous. When I'm young, I start on crickets and freshly molted worms, and later feed upon small rodents (small mice), but I will also eat greens and vegetables.
- ▶ I am most noted for upright running on my hind legs, giving me the appearance of miniature *Tyrannosaurus rex*.

😊 I am the _____





- ▶ I am a pear-shaped bird with short legs and roundish wings. I have a very interesting head plume.
- ▶ I eat seeds of forbs, grasses, shrubs, trees and cacti as well as herbaceous material, fruits and berries.
- ▶ I live in the Sonoran desert of Arizona and Mexico, but also in southern New Mexico, along the Rio Grande, up the Colorado River drainage into Utah's canyon country, and west to California and southern Nevada.

☺ I am the _____

- ▶ I am named after my tail, which is shaped like a cotton ball and after my favorite habitat, that is dry desert-like grasslands and shrublands.
- ▶ I am a herbivore, and eat a wide variety of plants, including grasses, forbs, shrubs and even cacti; however, ninety percent of my diet is grass.
- ▶ I take refuge in other animal's burrows as well as in my own scratched-out depressions. I line them with dried grasses and fill them with fur in anticipation of my babies.

☺ I am the _____

GAME 2: Look at the specimen in our display and color this large, venomous lizard.

Gila Monster
(*Heloderma suspectum*)

