

Keep Texas Wild

DESERT DWELLERS

Lots of animals can live with little water.



»WHO'S THIRSTY?

CAN YOU IMAGINE NEVER DRINKING WATER EVER AGAIN? For us humans, that's not possible, but for kangaroo rats it is. These amazing rodents get all the moisture they need from dry seeds! Many other animals have special adaptations that allow them to live where water is scarce. We call these animals "xerocoles." Some get moisture from the plants and animals they eat. Others, like scorpions, have special skin or shells that keep them from losing water or help them collect water. Lots of desert dwellers burrow underground or sleep during the heat of the day so they won't need as much liquid. As the moon rises and the sun sets, watch how the desert comes to life!

Kangaroo rat

» OUR CHUNK OF THE CHIHUAHUAN

The Chihuahuan Desert slices through West Texas and down into Mexico. It rains less here than anywhere else in our state!

» Desert bighorn sheep «



PHOTO BY TPWD

Using their horns and hooves to remove cactus spines lets them get to the wet stuff inside.

» Prickly pear «



PHOTO © JAMIE RICK ROLEN.COM

This cactus stores precious water in its pads.

» Coyotes «



PHOTO © TODD STEELE

Desert coyotes have paler coats than their relatives in cooler places. The lighter color keeps them from soaking in as much heat from the sun.

» Kangaroo rat «



PHOTO © BILL DRANKER ROLEN.COM

Special microscopic tubes remove liquid from their urine (the official word for "pee") and turn it back into water!

» Kit «



PHOTO © RICK AND NOBA BOWERS/KAC PRODUCTIONS

» Roadrunner «



PHOTO © KAC PRODUCTIONS

Though they don't fly very often, they can catch rattlesnakes in a flash!

» Ocotillo «



Nope, this plant isn't dead! Within days of a good rain, leaves will spring out from its "dead" branches.

» Ringtail «



To conserve water, ringtails come out when the sun (and the temperature!) goes down.

» Spanish dagger «



The leaves of these yucca are like big, long funnels and collect water when it rains.

» Elf owl «



These tiny birds (at only 5 1/2" tall!) make calls that sound like the yipping of a puppy.

» fox «



Hairs on the bottoms of their feet give these mammals better protection and traction on the desert's soil.

» Black-tailed jackrabbit «



Enormous ears full of blood vessels release heat and help keep these hares cool.

» Scorpion «



Underneath their hard covering (called an "exoskeleton") lies a special layer of fat that reduces water loss.

» Texas horned lizard «



Special scales on their skin help collect water and channel it to the lizards' mouths.



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD ART

EACH SPRING, cactus flowers decorate the Chihuahuan Desert in West Texas with many beautiful colors. Decorate your own desert by coloring the flowers on these cacti (plural for "cactus") and by adding more flowers. Don't forget to add color to the other desert dwellers in this picture.



>> WILD SCIENCE

Match these desert animals with interesting facts about them.

This reptile can live up to 60 years!



CACTUS WREN

Its name means "spear" because it has ultra-sharp tusks.



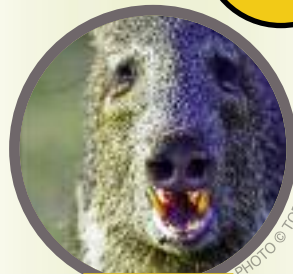
TARANTULA

This creepy critter has eight eyes!

In spite of its name, this animal doesn't eat cactus.



BIG FREE-TAILED BAT



JAVELINA

Because its face looks like a dog, this mammal is nicknamed "bulldog bat."



TEXAS TORTOISE

>> KEEPING IT WILD



Since more than half your weight comes from water, you're certainly not a xerocole! In fact, your body needs water even more than it needs food. How would you survive in the desert? Do you have any adaptations that would help you?

NEXT MONTH: The Wild Side of the Family



TEACHER RESOURCE

Visit www.tpwmagazine.com to download a printable PDF, access lesson plans, find additional resources or order copies.

PHOTOS BY TPWD