



## Roads Scholar Educational Adventures in Our Own Backyard

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CRIZMAC Art and Cultural Marketplace

# Desert Animals are Trading Spaces at Tohono Chul Park



Ever wanted to ride on a rattlesnake—or picnic on a tarantula’s back? A visit to the Garden for Children at Tohono Chul Park provides an opportunity to learn about the Sonoran Desert and the critters that inhabit it, as well as a chance to get up close and personal with giant-sized replicas of a few animals that you might not want to get *quite* so near in real life!

The Garden provides many clues about how both the plants and the animals of the desert are well adapted to life in this extreme environment. Instead of leaves, a cactus has sharp spines. The spines help to protect the cactus from animals that want to eat it. A cactus is also able to store water in its stem, which it can then use during times when there is no rain.

Animals in the desert must find a way to stay protected from the heat of the sun during the day. They also need access to food and water. But unlike the desert plants, which must survive in one spot, animals are able to move to the best location for the conditions.

A unique relationship exists between the Saguaro cactus, in particular, and many of the desert animals. The Saguaro cactus is like an apartment building. Many different animals live in it. When one moves out, another moves in. The Gila woodpecker uses its sharp beak to bore a deep hole in the cactus. He digs deep inside and makes a comfortable and roomy space. The cactus isn’t harmed by this; it forms a tough scab around the opening. In fact, the woodpecker actually helps the cactus by eating the insects that might otherwise bring disease. After a time, the woodpecker moves out of its nest and other animals, such as the pygmy owl, move in. Birds like the white-winged dove and the red-tailed hawk make nests on the arm of the saguaro. Many other animals, including insects, also make their homes in the cactus.

Pack rats are builders. They build complex nests, called “middens” out of brush, twigs and pieces of cactus. They often use the base of a prickly pear or cholla cactus as a site for their home, utilizing the cactus’ spines for protection from predators.

If you look carefully, you will notice occasional holes in the desert floor. These lead to the burrows of animals, such as tarantulas and centipedes, snakes, rabbits, and other small mammals like mice, who go underground to escape the desert heat. Most desert reptiles hibernate underground or in burrows during the cool winter months as well.

Still other animals seek shade above ground, under a cactus or a rock. Lizards, like other reptiles need the heat of the sun to warm their bodies. But when it gets too hot, they often find shade under a rock. This is why you may see a lizard skitter away when you walk too close to his rock hideaway.

If you sit still and watch and listen carefully, you'll find that what may seem an empty desert is actually full of life.

## **Tune-up Your Mind**

### **Look for these books and related materials:**

*Baby Rattlesnake/Viborita de Cascabel* (bi-lingual book) told by Te Ata and adapted by Lynn Moroney (Children's Book Press)

*Cactus Hotel* by Brenda Z. Guiberson (Henry Holt and Company)

*Coyote: A Trickster Tale from the American Southwest* by Gerald McDermott (Voyager Books)

*Creatures of the Desert World* (a pop-up book), (National Geographic Society)

*Efraín of the Sonoran Desert: A Lizard's Life Among the Seri Indians* by Amalia Astorga, Seri Indian Elder, as told to Gary Paul Nabhan (Cinco Puntos Press)

*The Other Way to Listen* by Byrd Baylor and Peter Parnall (Simon & Schuster)

## **Details**

**What:** Tohono Chul Park

**Where:** 7366 N. Paseo del Norte

**When:** 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. daily (except New Year's Day, July 4<sup>th</sup>, Thanksgiving, and Christmas)

Special Events:

**Stories in the Garden** is free with Park admission every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m.

**Family Ed-Ventures** – A walking tour of the Park that explores its features from a child's point of view is offered at 2:00 p.m. on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month during High Season (October through May).

**Who Eats Whom**—navigate the desert food web and see how interdependent the circle of desert life is at 2:00 p.m. on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month during High Season (October through May).

**Admission:** \$2.00 for children (5-12), \$5.00 for adults, \$4.00 for seniors (62+), \$3.00 for students with valid ID. Park members and children under 5 are free.

**Information:** 742-6455 or [www.tohonochulpark.org](http://www.tohonochulpark.org) and click on the “for Kids” button

## Discover Destours

### ANIMALS OF THE DESERT

Like the saguaro, desert animals must be able to live in a land that is dry and very hot. The saguaro provides a cool home for some animals, burrows and nests do the same for others. Help each of these animals find a good place to live by drawing a line from the animal to its home.



### Seeing Animals in the Wild and Attracting Them to Your Yard

First, you must be very quiet and still. Remember that animals will be scared away by loud noises and sudden movements. Don't ever try to approach, touch, or feed the animals by hand.

Make a birdbath or a bird feeder to attract birds to your yard. Visit <http://birding.about.com/cs/kidscrafts/index.htm> to find instructions for making some easy birdbaths and feeders. Animals will also be attracted if you plant trees and bushes that offer shelter and food for them.

Keep a pair of binoculars handy—either in your backpack when you're out, or by a porch, window, or deck at home so you'll be able to get a good look at the animals when they come into view. You might also want to keep a disposable camera nearby to snap a quick photo.

### **If you go...**

Print out the *Desert Pathfinders* Activity book at the Park's website, [www.tohonochohulpark.org/pdf/desertpathfindersactivitybook.pdf](http://www.tohonochohulpark.org/pdf/desertpathfindersactivitybook.pdf), before you go. It has lots of great activities to do both at the Park and at home. See how many of the birds on the "Birds, Birds, Birds" page you can spot during your visit. Look carefully at all of the birdhouses in the Children's Garden. Can you find the Cactus Hotel birdhouse? What interesting furnishings do you see in the other birdhouses?

### **Fuel for Thought**

#### **Did you know...**

The Gila monster is the one of only two species of venomous lizards. With bright pink, orange, or yellow and black beadlike scales, the Gila monster is a rare treat to find in the wild. If you are lucky enough to see one, keep your distance while you marvel at its unique appearance and slow movements. The Gila monster uses its sense of smell to find eggs, birds and other small animals to eat. When food is scarce, it lives off of the fat stored in its big tail.

This fascinating animal is the subject of many fables and superstitions. Some say that their breath is so nauseating and poisonous that they can overpower their prey simply by breathing on them! The truth is that their diet of rotting flesh may contribute to foul breath, but it is their bite and venom, not mere bad breath, that kills their prey. Another common misperception is once a Gila monster bites, it won't let go until sundown, or until it thunders. While it is true that the Gila monster is very tenacious in its grip, this is because its toxin is not injected like that of the snake, but flows into the wound as the lizard chews on its victim.

### **Think Tank**

#### **Discussion questions for the whole family to consider:**

How do you and your family adapt to life in the desert? Human beings are animals too, after all. Think about your home, its features and construction, and how you dress during different seasons and for various weather conditions. What do you do to protect yourself from the heat of the summer sun, cold winter nights, and rainstorms?

### **For the Mouse-bound**

[www.tohonochohulpark.org](http://www.tohonochohulpark.org)

[www.birding.about.com](http://www.birding.about.com)

[www.hasd.org/ges/desert/deserthabitat.htm](http://www.hasd.org/ges/desert/deserthabitat.htm)

### **Wheels Are Turning**

Parents and Caregivers: These activities can help your child meet Arizona's educational standards. The standards addressed here include:

4SC-R2. Describe the basic needs of living organisms.

4SC-F4. Identify characteristics of plants and animals that allow them to live in specific environments. (Grades 1-3)

4SC-E7. Explain and model the interaction and interdependence of living and non-living components within eco-systems, including the adaptation of plants and animals to their environment. (Grades 4-8)