

## Night Hike Notes

### Station I: Snakes

#### **Gophersnake**

- Often mistaken for a rattlesnake, but is non-venomous
- Imitates rattlesnakes by flattening its head, hissing, and vibrating its tail
- Eats rattlesnakes, rodents, rabbits, birds, eggs, and other reptiles
- Can reach a length of 6 feet or more - one of Arizona's biggest snakes!
- Beneficial to humans because it controls rodent and rattlesnake populations

#### **Rattlesnake**

- Scientists have identified 36 species of rattlesnakes, 13 of which you can find in Arizona - more than any other state!
- Rattlesnakes only live in North, Central, and South America.
- Rattlesnakes use the "loreal pit," a heat-sensing organ between the nostril and eye to locate prey and potential predators.
- These snakes have glands that make venom, much like human saliva glands make saliva.
- Rattlesnakes are venomous, not poisonous. Venomous things inject venom. Poisonous things are dangerous when eaten. So, there's actually no such thing as a poisonous snake!
- The rattle is made of keratin, the same material found in human hair and fingernails. The rattle is used to deter predators and grazing animals.
- The age of a rattlesnake cannot be determined by counting the segments of its rattle.
- Rattlesnake prey may include small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and centipedes.
- According to Arizona Poison Centers, less than 1% of rattlesnake bites result in human deaths.
- The Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake can grow to over 6 feet long and is the largest rattlesnake in the United States. They are larger than Arizona's Western Diamondback Rattlesnake.

#### **Coral Snake**

- The only snake in Arizona other than rattlesnakes with venom that is dangerous to humans.
- The Coral Snake is in the family Elapidae - along with the Cobras.
- Coral Snakes are fossorial, meaning they spend most of their time underground.
- Coral snakes eat primarily other fossorial snakes such as groundsnakes and threadsnakes.

#### **Sidewinder**

- One of our smaller rattlesnakes - easily identified by the horn-like scales above its eyes.
- Found primarily in low lying desert where it is a denizen of sandy areas.
- Gets its name from the way it moves when avoiding predators - sideways!

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## Night Hike Notes

### Station 2: Coyote and Ringtail Cat

#### **Coyote**

- Native to North America with an expanding range.
- Has a very wide diet including rodents, birds, reptiles, snakes, arthropods like large insects and arachnids. They've even been known to scavenge unattended dog food left in people's backyards.
- Den in burrows or within thick vegetation.
- Active at night (nocturnal) during the warmer months, but can be found out during the day (diurnal) during the cooler ones.
- One of most vocal north American mammals - 11 different calls
- Social units are formed around females. Sometimes they will form packs.
- In some areas, Coyotes will form close hunting relationships with badgers. (The badgers are great at digging up prey but are poor chasers while Coyotes aren't as skilled at digging but can run down the prey - not a pair you want to meet if you're a jackrabbit!)

#### **Ringtail Cat**

- Arizona's State mammal.
- While it does resemble a cat, it is more closely related to the raccoon.
- Grooms itself much like a cat.
- Active at night (nocturnal)
- Stalks and pounces on its prey like a cat.
- Mostly solitary.
- Lives in rocky crevices within steep canyons surrounding rocky stream beds.
- Eats insects, scorpions, small rodents, birds, eggs and some cactus fruit.
- Known as the "miners cat"; used by miners to control rodents and other vermin in their homes.

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## Night Hike Notes

### Station 3: Badger and Skunk

#### **Badger**

- Is easy to identify with its short stature, short and powerful legs, large claws, and striped face.
- Eats a variety of food including rodents, insects, reptiles, roots, and fruit. They get most of their food underground.
- Spends much of its time in underground burrows.
- Active at night (nocturnal).

#### **Striped Skunk**

- Common over much of the United States.
- Usually dens in burrows abandoned by other mammals or in hollow logs.
- Has a wide diet including vegetation, fruits, berries, eggs, carrion, insects, and rodents.
- They can deliver 5 to 6 jets of smelly spray up to fifteen feet.
- They are protective of their young and will fight off other predators.
- Their most common predator is the Great Horned Owl (they can't smell!)
- Black and white coloration advertises, "don't mess with me!"
- There are four species of skunk in Arizona - striped, spotted, hog-nosed, and hooded.
- To remove smell, use diluted hydrogen peroxide (3%), baking soda, and dishwashing liquid.
- Not legal to keep as pets in Arizona.

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## Night Hike Notes

### Station 4: Owls

#### **Great Horned Owl**

- Most common owl in North America.
- Active at dawn and dusk (crepuscular) and also late at night (nocturnal).
- Named for its large ear tufts.
- Primarily eats rabbits and mice but will sometimes hunt other prey like smaller owls and reptiles.
- Has a wingspan of 3-5 feet and has specialized feathers that allow them to fly quietly.
- Claws or talons can crush the skulls of its prey.
- Sometimes called the “hoot owl” because of its haunting “hoot, hoot, hoot” calls at night.

#### **Barn Owl**

- Lives over most of the world’s continents except Antarctica (called a cosmopolitan species).
- Has a heart-shaped facial disk (the feathers around its face) that help it to funnel sound to their ears.
- Their center talon has serrated edge like a steak knife. This specialized talon is used for grooming facial disk feathers.
- Active at night (nocturnal) and eats small mammals/rodents.
- Mate for life.
- Call is a loud screeching sound.

#### **Elf Owl**

- Nest and roosts in tree cavities and Saguaro Cactus and Sycamore trees.
- Is active at night (nocturnal) and eats insects i.e. centipedes, scorpions, etc.
- Is North America’s smallest owl at 5.75 inches.
- It’s call is a series of whistled notes and also a sharp high bark.
- Migrate from Central and Southern Mexico.

#### **Screech Owl**

- Nocturnal.
- Eats insects, reptiles, and small mammals.
- Both parents feed young.
- Hunt from perches such as trees and cacti.
- Nests in cavities in trees or cacti.

## Night Hike Notes

### Station 5: Toads

People are often surprised to know that several toads live in the Desert. Their behavior and life cycle is often tied to the Two Monsoon seasons in Arizona. Many emerge at the beginning of our summer monsoon season. They seek out temporary pools to find a mate and breed and their offspring must transform from an egg, to a tadpole, to an adult toad before the puddles dry up. Once the desert goes dry, these toads burrow deep underground until the summer rains return. They have many adaptations, including the ability to secrete a water-saving slimy coat, to keep them alive and well during this long hibernation. When caught or handled, some toads will swell up, void their bladder (pee - a lot!), or secrete poisonous oils from their skin.

#### **Woodhouse Toad**

- One of Arizona's most common toads
- Has a loud, scream-like call
- Has displaced the Arizona Toad as flowing streams have been dammed or otherwise altered.

#### **Sonoran Desert Toad**

- Arizona's largest toad
- Adults are a solid, clay-like green while juveniles are spotted. The pattern slowly fades as the animal ages.
- Is known for the poisonous secretions it releases from its large, obvious white glands.

#### **Red-Spotted Toad**

- One of Arizona's smaller toads.
- Named for the many red spots, or tubercles, on its skin.
- Is extremely fast to develop from an egg to an adult, allowing it to breed in temporary desert pools.
- Has a call that sounds similar to a finger running quickly over a plastic comb.

#### **Spadefoot Toad**

- Burrow into the ground using hard protrusion on their hind feet.
- Spend the majority of their life underground, only emerging during significant monsoon rains during which temporary pools provide the opportunity to breed.
- Development from egg to frog happens very quickly because of the temporary nature of their breeding pools. Eggs can hatch in as little as 36 hours, and tadpoles can metamorphose into adults in as little as 7 days.
- Eats small arthropods such as flies, crickets, caterpillars, moths, spiders, earthworms, and snails.
- There are three species of spadefoot toad in Arizona (Couch's, Mexican, and Great Plains)

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