

# Animals that live in Sabino Canyon



**Bobcat:** I am a medium-sized cat, but MUCH larger than your pet kitty. I can be as big as some dogs, and weight up to 25 lbs. I am yellowish-brown to gray. My most noticeable features are my short, black-tipped tail and my tufted ears that look pointy. I like to live on rocky, brushy hillsides where I can hide to catch my prey of rabbits, birds, squirrels, or even sometimes deer or Javelina. Because I eat only other animals, I am called a carnivore.

**White-tail Deer:** My tail doesn't look white unless I am frightened. Then I raise my tail up and show the white underside to warn the other deer of danger. I can run fast (30-40 mph) and jump high to escape from coyotes, mountain lions or bobcats who want to eat me. I am an herbivore; I eat only plants. I am a female so I don't have antlers. Only the males do, and they shed their antlers every year and grow new ones.



**Cardinal:** I am easy to see because of my bright red color. Females are light brown so they can hide more easily on the nest. We like to build our nests in mesquite trees and in thickets, where we can find insects, seeds and berries to eat.

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**Desert Tortoise:** I can easily be recognized because of my thick, hard shell. It is tough for a predator to bite through it, and I can also squeeze my head and legs into it for extra protection. I can live to be 80 years old. I can store enough water inside my body to last an entire season. I am an herbivore; I eat only plants. I like to live where the ground is flat, so I can burrow under the soft ground to escape the hot sun and the cold. The biggest threats to the survival of tortoises like me are: habitat loss, human contact (like cars) and predators which eat baby tortoises.



**Roadrunner:** I can fly, though I don't very often because I can run so fast - up to 15 mph! I am very colorful with brown feathers streaked with black and green, and spotted with white flecks. You can see these colors best when I am in the sun., I have a long tail, crested head, strong, pointed beak, and sturdy legs for running, of course! My tracks are easy to identify because they look like the letter X: I have two toes facing forward and two which face backward. I eat grasshoppers and other insects, lizards and small snakes. After I catch my prey I beat it on a rock to kill it and then swallow it whole.

**Round-tailed Ground Squirrel:** I am light brown colored with a slender, not bushy, tail. I like to live at the base of creosote bushes where I can easily dig a burrow in the soft soil. I hide inside when it's hot and come out when it's cooler to look for the insects, plants, and seeds that I eat. Because I eat both plants and insects, I am called an omnivore. Unfortunately for me, snakes can crawl down into my burrow to eat me, and hawks and owls may catch me when I am outside.





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**Western Diamondback Rattlesnake:** I am the most common large snake in Arizona. You can recognize me by my triangle-shaped head, my “raccoon” (alternating black and white) striped tail and diamond patterned skin, and, of course, my rattles. I eat squirrels, mice, packrats, small rabbits, and sometimes birds. I swallow all my food whole because my teeth are not good for chewing. I can go several weeks between meals. Hawks, coyotes, roadrunners and king snakes will eat me, so I hide in rock crevices or abandoned burrows.



*Fact (true) or cactifract (false)?* The Western Diamondback always rattles as a warning before striking. *This is a cactifract (false):* Don't count on a rattlesnake rattling to warn you it is nearby. Sometimes there is not enough time for it to make any noise. Some other types of snakes will shake their tail to imitate a rattler's sound to scare away predators. It's best to keep a sharp lookout!



**Regal Horned Lizard:** Some people call me “horny toad”, but I am really a lizard. I guess I look a little like a toad, because of my short, round body, but look for the spines around my head and the edges of my body. My skin is the color of the soil (tan/gray) and I can even change my color so that I can be camouflaged from hawks, snakes and other lizards which might eat me. I like to eat Harvester ants so I crouch by their nests or along their trails, and pick them up with my sticky tongue. I eat other insects and spiders too, because you gotta eat a LOT of ants to get a decent meal! At night, I bury

myself in sand so no one will see me while I am asleep.

*Fact or cactifract?* Regal Horned Lizards can squirt blood from the corners of their eyes. *This is a fact.* An unusual way for the lizard to protect itself from predators - and shock humans!



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**Desert Cottontail:** I am easy to recognize because of my fluffy white “cottontail”, though the rest of me is gray-brown. I have long ears and large eyes on the sides of my head so I can see predators sneaking up behind me. I am an herbivore, and I can get all the water I need from the plants I eat. I can live just about anywhere I can find food, even in your backyard! Every predator (coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, owls, hawks and snakes) in Sabino Canyon wants to eat me, so I have to always be alert.

*Fact or cactifract?* Desert Cottontails use their ears to help keep them cool. *Fact:* The larger-than-usual size of the Desert Cottontail’s ears has more blood vessels than other animal’s ears, which help to dissipate heat when temperatures are extreme. Those big ears also help it to hear predators approaching.

**Gila Woodpecker:** Notice my flashy, red cap. This means I am a male (females don’t have the red cap). I have a strong, pointy beak that I use to peck holes in Saguaros. I eat insects, berries and cactus fruit. In fact, I am one of the most important dispersers of Saguaro seeds. You might see me in your backyard, drinking out of a hummingbird feeder, or stealing your dog’s food! During mating season I like to hammer with my beak on telephone poles, metal roofs, and pipes to signal to other woodpeckers.

*Fact or cactifract?* Gila Woodpeckers peck holes in Saguaros to eat the juicy flesh. *This is a cactifract:* Gila Woodpeckers peck holes in Saguaros to make a nest cavity which is cool and safe for their young. They must wait several months before using the cavity to nest, to allow the inner part of the cactus to dry and scab over.



Note: You can find more “Facts and Cactifracts” like these in “Correctamundo! Prickly Pete’s Guide to Desert Facts and Cactifracts” by David Lazaroff (Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, 2001)

Photos courtesy of Ned Harris