

Chapter 17

Desert Animals

Deserts are the driest places on earth and sometimes go for months, or even years, without rain. But even the desert animals cannot survive without water, or for long periods in the scorching sun, so they have had to find different ways of coping with the harsh conditions. For example gerbils spend the hottest part of the day in cool underground burrows. Not all deserts are endless seas of rolling sand dunes. Some are rocky or pebbly and dotted with small bushes while others are sprinkled with colourful flowers during the spring.



There are more than 2300 different kinds of snakes around the world. Most snakes are quite harmless — but there are a few that are so poisonous they can kill a human being with just one bite. Most snakes lay eggs, but there are many which give birth to their young. In the dry, rocky deserts of America lives a rather evil-looking snake with a very bad reputation.

But the rattlesnake, or 'rattler' as it is sometimes called, prefers to avoid people if it possibly can. It holds its tail upright and rattles the end whenever it is disturbed, in the hope that the intruder will go away. But the rattler itself cannot hear the noise its own tail makes. Like most snakes, it 'hears' things through vibrations in the ground. If a person walks nearby the snake can feel the movement. But if the same person were to shout, it would not hear a thing. Rattlesnakes are very common and widespread animals, living right across the

Teacher's Note: Show the pupils pictures of various desert animals.

American continent from Canada to Argentine. They feed on a variety of prey, including mice, voles, rats, chipmunks and many other small animals. Rattlesnakes kill their prey with venom. Like all snakes, they swallow the unfortunate animals whole.

Mongoose like to hunt together, but they always keep a lookout for dangerous predators nearby. Poking their noses into holes, overturning rocks with their paw as and scratching the ground with their sharp claws, banded mongooses are very amusing animals to watch. A common sight in many parts of Africa,



they travel in groups of about twenty to forage for beetles, millipedes and other small creature.

They like to hunt together, keeping in touch whenever they go out of sight behind rocks or bushes by twittering and calling.

Mongoose are famous for being able to kill snakes without getting hurt themselves. Their reactions are so fast they can dodge each time the snake strikes. They continually make a nuisance of themselves until, after a while, when the snake gets tired, they quickly dive in for the kill.

All the female mongooses have their kitten at about the same time. They are raised by the whole group in a den made inside an old termite mound or hollow log.

Another animal which lives in the desert is the camel. Camels were first domesticated by people many thousand of years ago. In the wild, camels usually live in small groups of up to thirty animals. Camels have long, shaggy winter coats to keep warm and shorter, tidier coats in the summer to keep cool.

A thirsty camel can drink as much as thirty gallons of water — that's about five hundred full glasses — in just ten minutes. Normally, it can survive for up to ten months without drinking any water at all.

There are two different kinds of camel. One, known as the Dromedary, has only



a single hump; the other is called Bactrian camel and has two humps. The humps help the animals to survive in the desert, by acting as storage containers. These humps are full of fat that nourishes the camels when food is scarce. If they have nothing to eat for several days, their humps shrink as the fat is used up. Their mouths are so tough that even the sharp thorn cannot pierce through.

TIWARI
ACADEMY

Words to Learn

scorching
chipmunks
dodge

gerbils
predator
humps

dunes
amusing
shrink

pebblyvoles
forage

● Skill Test ●

WORK OUT

A. Answer the following questions :

1. How do desert animals survive without water ?

2. How do mongooses kill snakes ?
.....
3. How does the hump of the camels helps them to survives when there is not water ?
.....

B. Write 'true' or 'false' :

1. No animal can survive without water.
2. Desert are endless sand dunes.
3. Most snakes are harmless.
4. Snakes cannot hear, but they can feel vibrations though the ground.
5. Camels store water in their humps.

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GRAMMAR

A. Look at these sentences :

Y Most snakes are quite harmless, but a few are poisonous.

Y Most snakes lay eggs, but the rattlesnake gives birth to its young.

Now write five sentences using '*most*' and the clues given below :

1. (A majority of) people agree hat he is a good patrician, (just a few) disagree.
.....
2. (The majority of) films are romances, (a few) are tragic.
.....
3. (90% of) the people are honest (10%) are dishonest.
.....
4. (Lot of) fruit have plenty of sugar, (some) citrus fruit are low in sugar.
.....
5. (Every soft drink except this one) has lots of 'empty calories'.
.....

VOCABULARY

A. Write the opposites :

driest

hottest

colourful

harmless

common
unfortunate
able

include
predator
small

B. Match the words with their meanings :

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1. scorching | a. heaps of sand formed by wind |
| 2. gerbils | b. small plant-eating rodents |
| 3. dunes | c. very hot |
| 4. pebbly | d. small ground squirrels having light and dark stripes |
| 5. voles | e. mouse-like desert rodents with long hind legs |
| 6. chipmunks | f. stony |
| 7. predator | g. interesting, enjoyable |
| 8. amusing | h. search for food |
| 9. forage | i. an animal naturally preying on others |

C. Make new words by joining these words :

with	ground	without
rain	spread
under	call
sand	out
wide	bow
over	guard
alarm	dune
safe	turn