

VELVET MESQUITE – *Prosopis velutina*

Range – Through Arizona, into New Mexico and south into Mexico.

Habitat – Although mainly a desert and grasslands dweller, mesquites also live in moist areas just up from the water edge, forming thick forests called “bosques.”

Characteristics – These trees can grow to 30 feet. They have tiny, feather-like leaves. Mesquites also have very long “tap” roots which grow very deep into the soil to reach water.

Other – Mesquites provide food and shelter for a variety of animals. They bloom in the spring, attracting numerous species of insects. By summer, the pollinated blossoms produce the protein-rich, yellowish bean pods which are eaten by many animals. During the winter and times of drought, the mesquite will drop its leaves.



Photo : Bruce Prior



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WOLFBERRY – *Lycium berlandieri*

Range – Southern Arizona east to Texas and south into Mexico.

Habitat – Desert scrub, rocky desert slopes and desert plains.

Characteristics – A large, thorny shrub reaching over four feet in height. Wolfberry blooms sporadically and produces red berry-like fruits.

Other – Wolfberry produces its leaves in response to rain. It may be leafless during times of drought. A variety of desert birds and other animals eat its fruits.

REPTILES OF SWEETWATER WETLANDS

WESTERN DIAMOND-BACKED RATTLESNAKE – *Crotalus atrox*

Range – Across the warm southern states from Arkansas west to California.

Habitat - Prefer deserts, rocky canyons and foothills but found in a variety of habitats from the plains to the mountains.

Food - They feed mainly on small mammals such as rats, mice and even small rabbits. They will also eat small birds such as quail. They feed mostly at night. They have potent venom which they use to help subdue prey.

Other – Western diamond-backed rattlesnakes average 3 to 5 feet in length and are the largest rattlesnakes in the west. Like most rattlesnakes, they will lay in the sun to warm up their bodies and seek shade under rock crevices when they get too warm.



Photo : Earle Robinson



Photo : Paul Berquist

SONORAN DESERT TOAD – *Bufo alvarius*

Range – Mostly occur in the Sonoran Desert but range west to California, and into central Arizona.

Habitat – Deserts and grasslands near a water source.

Food – These predators will eat just about anything they can catch including large insects and other frogs and toads.

Other – They spend winter underground and dig to the surface to become active throughout the summer. Sonoran Desert Toads lay their eggs in water, with the first weeks of their lives spent as tadpoles. The glands on their backs contain a toxin that can be harmful to animals (including humans). They are the largest native toad in the United States.



Photo : Dennis Caldwell

TREE LIZARD - *Urosaurus ornatus*

Range – From Arizona east to Texas, north to Wyoming and south into Mexico.

Habitat – Lives on trees and rocks in riparian, woodland, semi-desert and urban areas.

Food – These small carnivores feed primarily on insects and spiders.

Other – Look for tree lizards doing "push-ups" on tree branches at Sweetwater Wetlands.

RED-EARED SLIDER TURTLE – *Trachemys scripta elegans*

Range – From Georgia to New Mexico north to Illinois and Indiana. Not native to Arizona and those at Sweetwater Wetlands were introduced.

Habitat – Lives in fresh water ponds, lakes and slow moving streams. Prefers muddy bottoms.

Food – They eat aquatic vegetation, invertebrates and small fish. They also eat decaying vegetation.

Other – These turtles love to bask in the sun and are commonly seen on logs and on the banks of Sweetwater Wetlands.



Photo : Paul Berquist



Photo : Paul Berquist

RED-SPOTTED TOAD – *Bufo punctatus*

Range – East to Central Texas and Kansas and west to California. Also occurs south into Mexico.

Habitat – Prefers riparian areas (near streams and small water courses) in otherwise arid habitats. Likes to hide among streamside rocks.

Food – They primarily eat insects.

Other – The cricket-like call of the males can be heard in desert riparian areas during the summer rainy season. They are prey to a variety of predators.

SONORAN GOPHER SNAKE – *Pituophis catenifer affinis*

Range – Gopher snakes occur across North America into Canada and Mexico. The Sonoran subspecies occurs in the Sonoran Desert.

Habitat – Found in a variety of habitats from deserts to forests. Also found in cultivated fields and urban, open space. Prefers grassy and brushy areas.

Food – These predators kill their prey by constriction (squeezing). They eat small mammals, birds, lizards and even other snakes.

Other – Gopher snakes are eaten by a variety of predators including hawks, coyotes and foxes. They resemble rattlesnakes and even mimic rattlesnake behavior by coiling and shaking their tails.



Photo : Paul Berquist



Photo : Dennis Caldwell

BULLFROG – *Rana catesbeiana*

Range – Native to the eastern and central states but now occurs throughout most of the United States.

Habitat – Warm ponds, lakes, wetlands and watercourses. The bullfrog is purely an aquatic species.

Food – These voracious predators eat other amphibians, reptiles, fish, insects and almost anything they can catch.

Other – This frog has been introduced in numerous states as a food source. It is hunted for its leg meat. It has become an invasive species, killing off native species through predation and competition.