

DESERT CREATURES

COMPREHENSION
CRUSHER

Deserts are the driest places on Earth. They can be scorching hot or freezing cold, but they always have strong winds and very little rainfall. Because of this, deserts are home to few animals and plants; however, those that do live there are amazingly adapted to survive in these harsh environments.

Almost 7,000 types of vertebrate animals live in deserts, but only about 3% of these animals are found only in deserts.

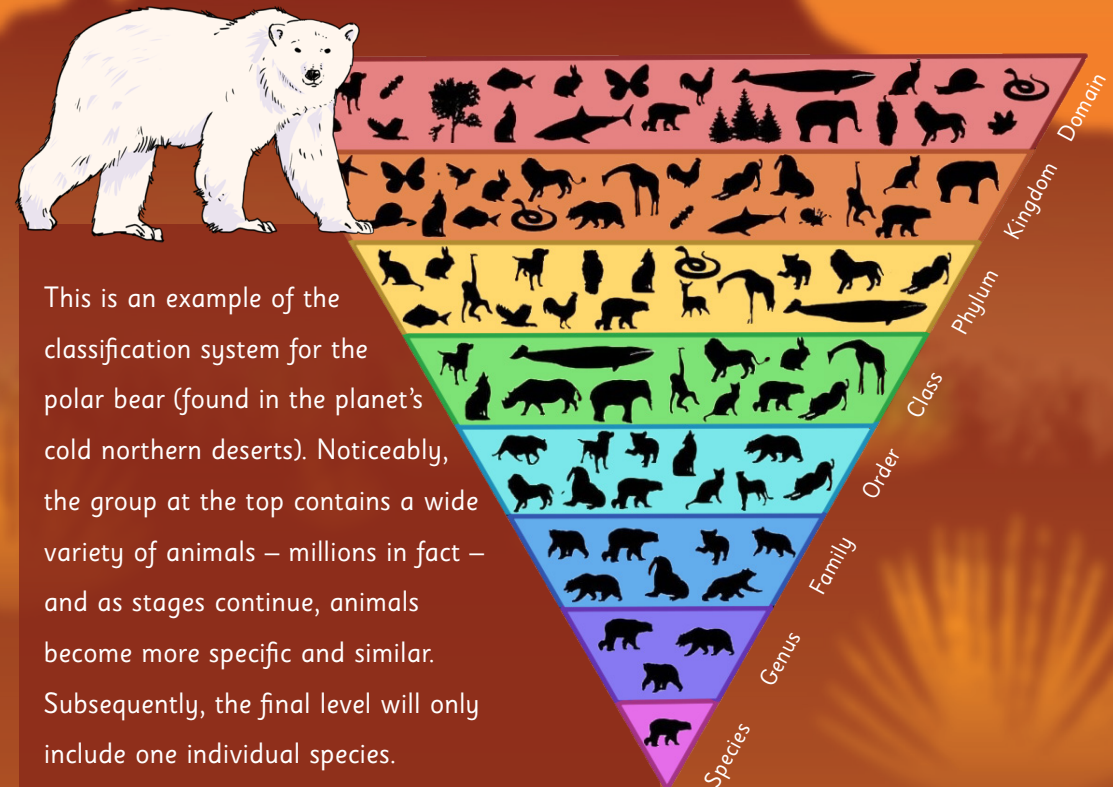
Adaptation

Organisms living in a desert biome need special physical characteristics to survive. In an arid desert, you'll find animals with the ability to survive for long stretches of time without water and endure extreme temperatures. Many of them are also nocturnal or live underground to avoid the unbearable heat of the midday sun.

In cold deserts, animals rely on thick fur to survive the freezing temperatures. Because they are so well adapted to these harsh conditions, even slight changes in temperature can threaten their survival.

The classification system

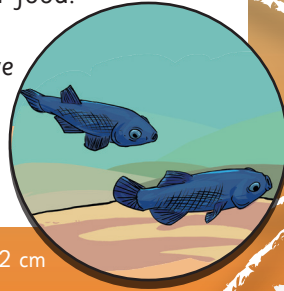
In 1758, a system was designed to demonstrate how the different living organisms of our planet can be categorised into sub-groups. This system was groundbreaking at the time. It helps us to appreciate how life on our planet is unique, yet all related.



Devils Hole pupfish

Even in one of the driest places on Earth, fish can survive. The Devils Hole pupfish lives in a deep rock pool in Nevada's Mojave Desert. This tiny, rare fish survives in water that stays at a constant 33°C, which is an extreme temperature for most aquatic life. It has also adapted to live with very little oxygen or food.

Because it exists in just one fragile habitat, conservationists have built a nearby refuge facility, where pupfish eggs are carefully raised and bred to help protect the species from extinction.



Average body length: 2 cm

Animalia > Chordata > Actinopterygii > Cyprinodontiformes > Cyprinodontidae > Cyprinodon > C. diabolis

Ringtail

Ringtails are found across the deserts and rocky landscapes of the south-western United States and northern Mexico. This creature's agile body is perfectly suited to their habitat.

Because they have ankles that can rotate 180 degrees, a long tail and fantastic grip, they are expert climbers, often seen ascending and descending cliffs, trees and even cacti. Ringtails obtain moisture from the fruit, insects and small animals they eat; therefore, they can survive even where water is scarce.



Average body length:

30-42 cm

Average tail length:

31-44 cm

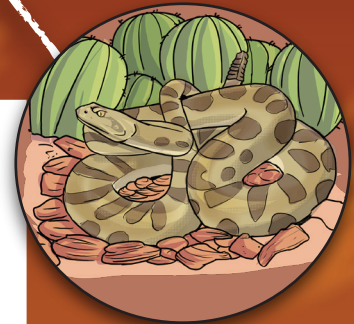
Did you know?

Ringtails can perform cartwheels to quickly change direction!

Animalia > Chordata > Mammalia > Carnivora > Procyonidae > Bassariscus > Bassariscus astutus

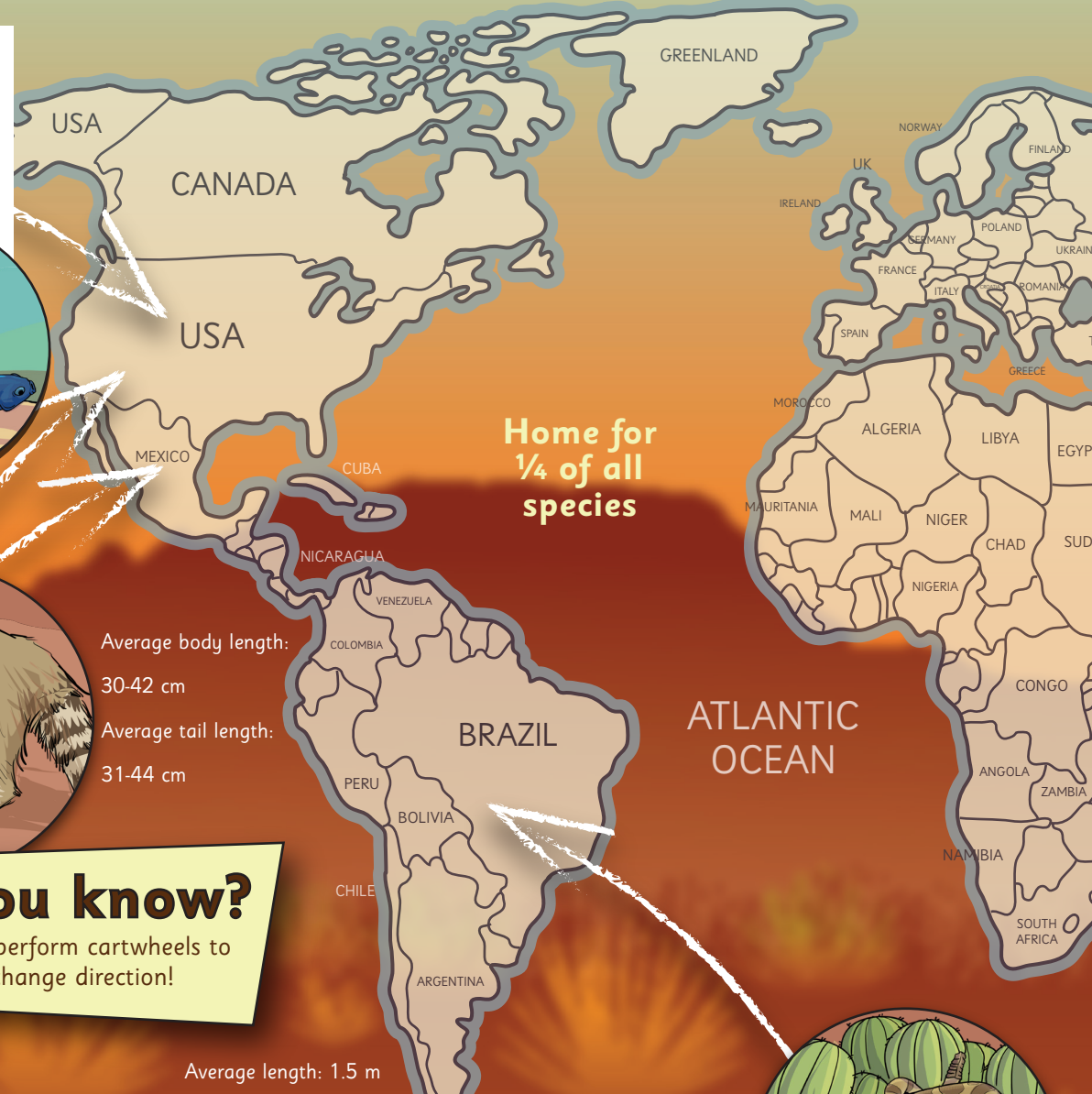
South American rattlesnake

This highly venomous rattlesnake thrives in the deserts and grasslands of South America. It can grow to over two metres in length. Its body is covered in various shades of brown with darker spots, allowing it to blend into sandy or rocky ground to avoid predators and ambush prey. To cope with extreme heat, this snake shelters in burrows during the day and becomes active at night, using heat-sensing pits to detect warm-blooded animals. It can also survive with little water, gaining the moisture it needs from the animals it eats. Its most iconic survival tool is its distinctive rattle, which it shakes to warn intruders before striking with its venomous bite.



Average length: 1.5 m

Animalia > Chordata > Reptilia > Squamata > Serpentes > Viperidae > Crotalus > Crotalus durissus



Home for
1/4 of all
species

ATLANTIC
OCEAN

ARCTIC
OCEAN

RUSSIA

KAZAKHSTAN

MONGOLIA

Lowest
temperature:
-20°C

(Taklamakan Desert, China)

CHINA

JAPAN

INDIA

VIETNAM

PHILIPPINES

PACIFIC
OCEAN

MALAYSIA

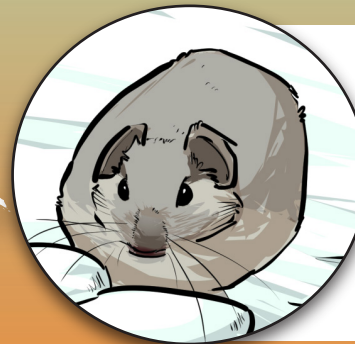
INDONESIA

INDIAN
OCEAN

AUSTRALIA

Average body length: 10-13.5 cm

Arctic lemming



These speedy thick-furred lemmings rely on underground tunnels for warmth. As they have a flat claw on each paw, digging is easy: they sometimes remain underground for the whole winter!

Animalia > Chordata > Mammalia > Rodentia > Cricetidae > Arvicolinae > Dicrostonyx > Dicrostonyx torquatus

Indian red scorpion



Scorpions are a crucial part of the desert ecosystem, both as predator and prey. Their bodies camouflage for a stealthy approach towards smaller animals. If you were to be stung by this scorpion, terrifying consequences – and perhaps death – would await you!

Animalia > Arthropoda > Chelicerata > Arachnida > Scorpiones > Buthidae > Hottentotta > Hottentotta tamulus

African desert warbler

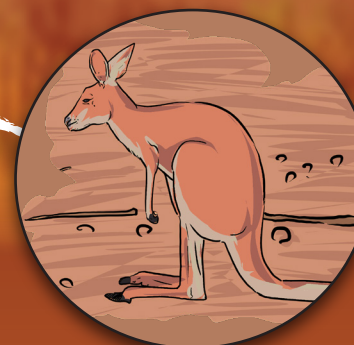
This yellow-coloured bird camouflages against its habitat. Their keen eyesight helps to identify ground-dwelling insects. They have a pointed beak and their nests are hidden within low-lying bushes.



Animalia > Chordata > Aves > Passeriformes > Sylviidae > Curruca > Curruca deserti

Average body length: 11-12 cm

Red kangaroo



Red kangaroos have several adaptations for surviving the scorching heat: their body is cooled by regular sweating and panting. They also graze at night. Red kangaroos will frequently lick their forearms when sweating isn't sufficient. Moisture from their saliva evaporates and lowers their body temperature.

Animalia > Chordata > Mammalia > Marsupialia > Diprotodontia > Macropodidae > Osphranter > Osphranter rufus