

Galleta
Hilaria jamesii

Threeawn
Aristida longiseta

Ringtail
Bassariscus astutus
511

Least Chipmunk
Eutamias minimus
497

Desert Woodrat
Neotoma lepida
493

White-tailed Antelope Squirrel
Ammospermophilus leucurus
499

Sagebrush Lizard
Sceloporus graciosus
212

Tree Lizard
Urosaurus ornatus
205

Side-blotched Lizard
Uta stansburiana
202

Gopher Snake
Pituophis melanoleucus
263

Striped Whipsnake
Masticophis taeniatus
221

White-tailed Prairie Dog
Cynomys gunnisoni

Plateau Whiptail
Cnemidophorus velox

Western Whiptail
Cnemidophorus tigris
206

Glossy Snake
Arizona elegans
268

Night Snake
Hypsiglena torquata
267

The grass component is diverse. In many places, however, certain species are so abundant that they have been accorded the rank of a separate vegetation type. The association involving Galleta and Threeawn forms one of these groups, which occurs at about 5000 feet or slightly higher, in southeastern Utah.

Animals in the arid portion of the Plateau include species that also have wide distributions in either the grasslands or the Great Basin Desert. Of the species that are discussed in the context of other deserts, those occurring here include the Ringtail, the Least Chipmunk, the Desert Woodrat, the White-tailed Antelope Squirrel, and the Black-tailed Jack Rabbit. In addition, several desert reptile species are common, among them the Sagebrush, Collared, Tree, and Side-blotched lizards and the Gopher Snake and Striped Whipsnake. Unique to the area are the White-tailed Prairie Dog; the Plateau Whiptail, a handsome striped lizard with a bluish tail; and several subspecies of lizards and snakes. These characteristic subspecies include the Northern Whiptail, a form of the Western Whiptail; the Painted Desert Glossy Snake; the Mesa Verde Night Snake; and the Midget Faded Rattlesnake, a diminutive, pinkish form of the Western Rattlesnake.

The reptile and mammal species that are characteristic of the Great Basin Desert but do not occur on the Colorado Plateau underline by their absence the unique nature of the arid areas of the Plateau. These mammals include the Sagebrush Vole, the Kit Fox, Merriam's Kangaroo Rat, several species of pocket mice, the Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rat, and both species of kangaroo mice. Of the missing reptiles, the most prominent are the Desert Horned Lizard, the Longnose Snake, the Ground Snake, the Zebratail Lizard, and the Patchnose Snake.

The birds here are generally those that are typical in the deserts or grasslands. Most of the species common in arid areas are included in this book.

Since the Colorado Plateau contains many mountains exceeding 11,000 feet in elevation, along with their associated montane floras and faunas, a significant part of the region's biota is beyond the purview of this book.

Although the coverage of the details of the Plateau given here is scant because the region is not a true desert, this field guide will be appropriate to use in locales marked by low elevation and sparse, shrubby vegetation. This superficial coverage is not meant to demean an area that is geologically among the most spectacular in the entire world. The Colorado Plateau offers an incredible experience, one that can be a welcome break as you tour the true deserts of North America.

THE MOJAVE DESERT

Like most other North American deserts, the Mojave Desert is contained in the Basin and Range Province. Many biologists have claimed that there is no Mojave Desert per se, but that in fact the area is really a transitional vegetation type wedged between the Great Basin Desert to the north and the Sonoran Desert to the south. This point of view has its strengths: Physiographically the Mojave Desert is clearly intermediate because it straddles two separate sections of the Basin and Range Province, the Great Basin Section to the north and the Sonoran Desert Section to the south. Since both of these Sections are simply subdivisions of the overall Basin and Range Province, there are obvious similarities between them; for example, both contain mountain ranges separated by basins that are generally drained internally and are accompanied by playas.

The two Sections also differ in some ways. In general, the basin floors of the Sonoran Desert are lower in elevation than those of the Great Basin. The Great Basin has base elevations of 4000 feet or higher, while elevations in the Sonoran section are usually quite a bit less than 3000 feet; in the extreme, they may be below sea level. The lowest point in the United States occurs in the Mojave Desert at Death Valley National Monument in California, where the elevation is 282 feet below sea level. This is in stark contrast to the 11,049-foot Telescope Peak in the Panamint Range just west of Badwater. The fact that the biological boundaries of the Mojave Desert do not coincide with the boundaries of one of the Sections defined by landscape physiography can be confusing. As you move to the south end of the Great Basin, there is a decrease in elevation—and rather an abrupt one. But you must travel even farther south at these lower elevations before you reach the Sonoran Desert Section boundary. On the other hand, the biologically based Great Basin Desert ends at the elevational break and the Mojave Desert commences. Thus, the physiographic and biological subdivisions do not coincide. Routes along two major highways make this somewhat clearer. Traveling from the Great Basin Desert near Tonopah, Nevada (6030 feet), you cross the area of the Great Basin Desert/Mojave Desert biological transition near Beatty, Nevada (3830 feet). Farther south, just past Las Vegas, Nevada (2200 feet), you approach the Great Basin Section/Sonoran Section physiographic boundary. A similar situation occurs traveling south along I-15 from Cedar City (5834 feet) in the Great Basin Desert of Utah down to St. George, Utah (2880 feet), obviously in the Mojave Desert. Farther south of St. George, in the Beaver Dam Wash area astride the Utah-Arizona border, you reach the lowest point in Utah (2350 feet), but it is still a bit farther south to the physiographic boundary. The northern portion of the Sonoran Desert physiographic section—that area occupied by the Mojave Desert—differs from the rest of the Sonoran Desert Section in that its basins, for the most part, have internal drainages. In this, they resemble the basins of the Great Basin Province, and differ from the southern Sonoran Desert Section which is traversed

