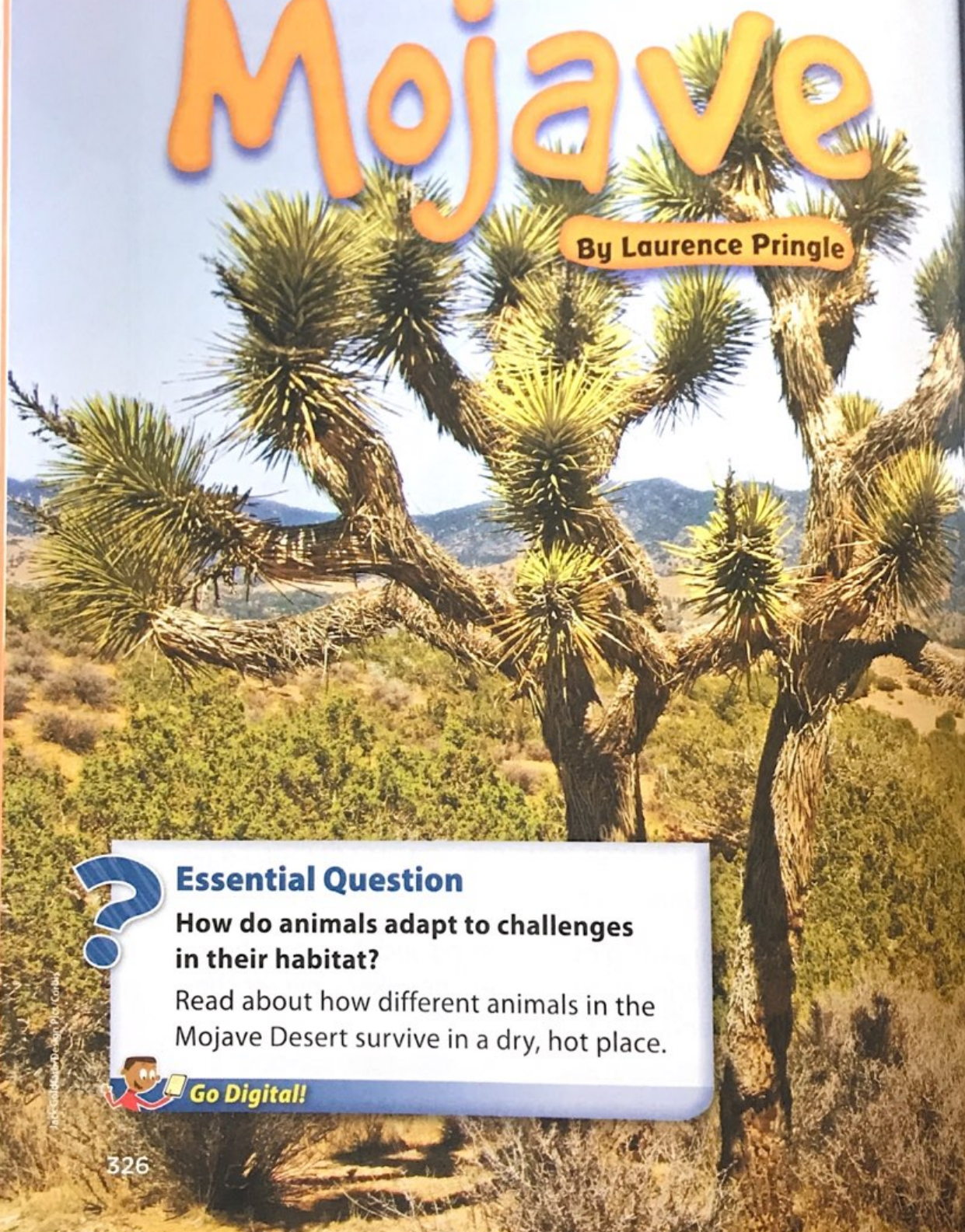


# Amazing Wildlife of the Mojave

By Laurence Pringle



## Essential Question

**How do animals adapt to challenges in their habitat?**

Read about how different animals in the Mojave Desert survive in a dry, hot place.



**Go Digital!**

**D**eserts are challenging places to live. They are dry and often very hot. Each year only a few inches of rain fall in the Mojave (Mo-HA-vee). It is North America's smallest desert. It lies mostly in parts of southern California and southern Nevada. The Mojave has both mountains and valleys. It includes Death Valley, the lowest and hottest place in North America.

On a car ride through the Mojave desert, you may pass by many miles of bare, dusty earth and scattered bushes. However, on a morning hike you can discover that a desert is a lively place. Birds sing. Lizards scurry after insects. Jackrabbits and roadrunners dash among the bushes and cactus plants.



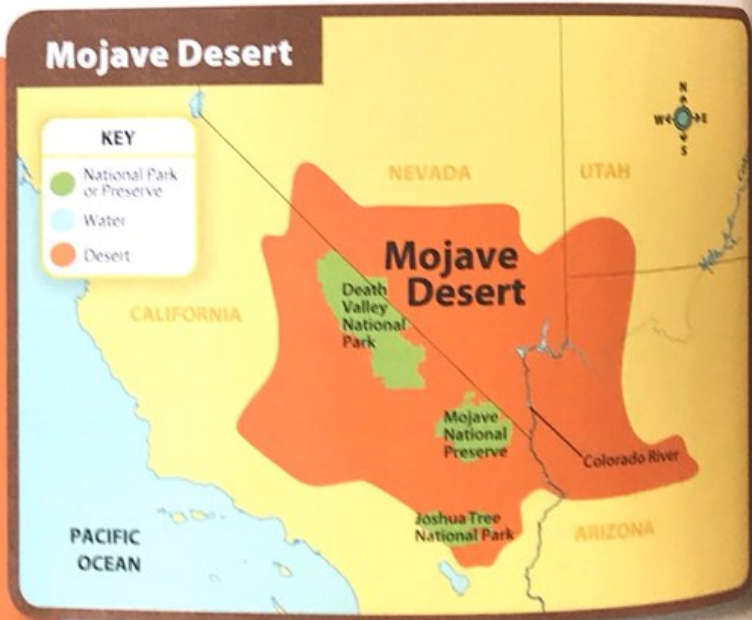
## A Living Place

Although it is very dry, the Mojave is a living place or environment for many fascinating animals and plants. Over many years they have changed, or adapted, so they live very well in a dry, hot environment. They do this in different ways. In the Mojave you might see several kinds of lizards. They are all **related**. All lizards are reptiles. Reptiles all have scaly skin. However, they are different in many ways. The desert spiny lizard, for example, is only a few inches long. Most of its food is insects.



This hawk looks out for food from the top of a yucca palm.

The name Mojave means "alongside water." It comes from the Mojave people. They were Native Americans who once lived along the Lower Colorado River. The river flows through part of the Mojave desert.



The chuckwalla is very different. It can grow to almost three feet long. This big lizard eats leaves, flowers, and fruit of plants. It also has a special way of protecting itself. If a chuckwalla senses danger, it quickly hides in a crack between rocks. Then it gulps in air, making its body fatter. It becomes tightly wedged in so that a predator cannot pull it out.

This chuckwalla will quickly squeeze itself between rocks if a predator comes near.



Marka/SuperStock

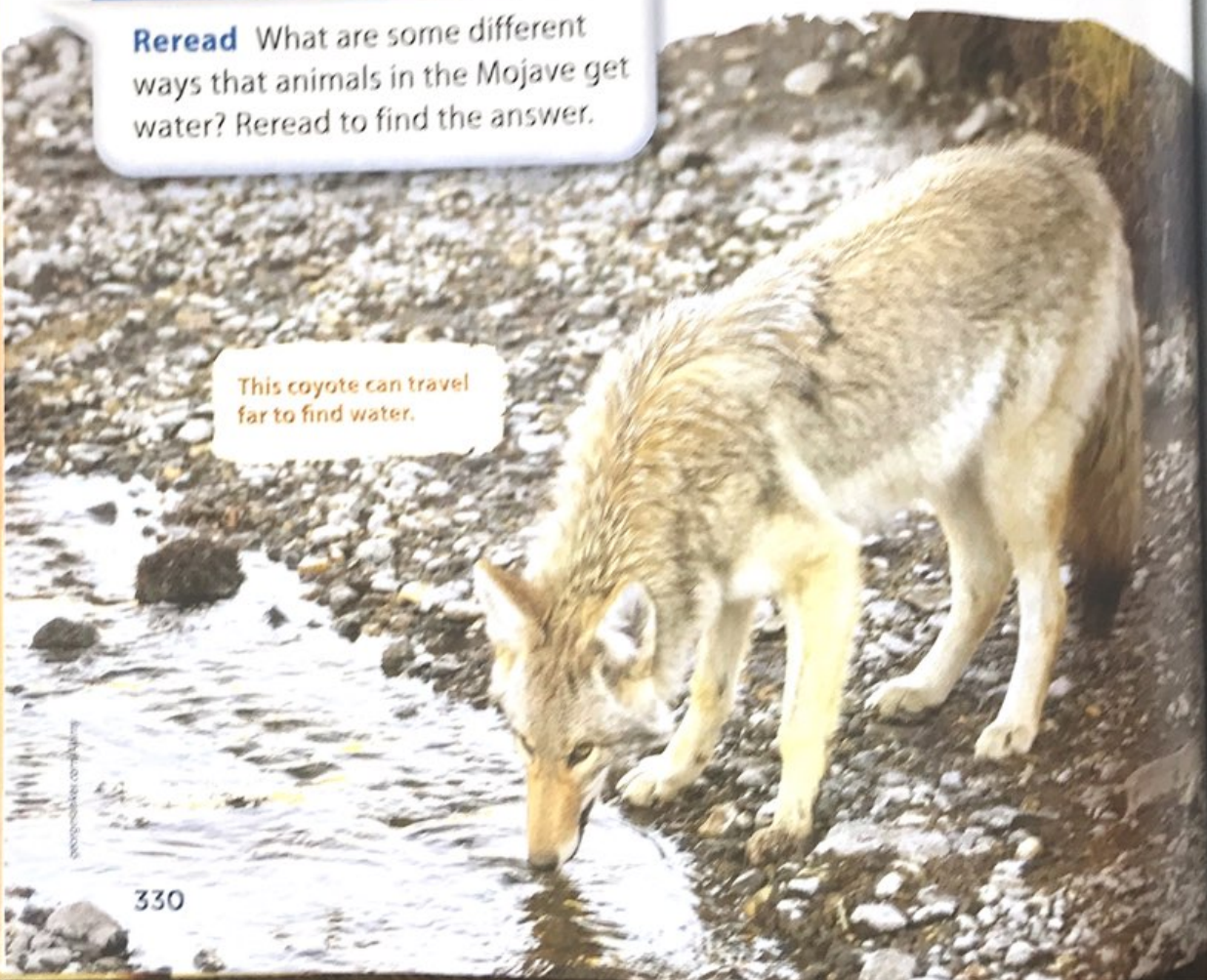
## Getting Water in the Desert


Animals get water in different ways in the Mojave. Coyotes, bobcats, and other large mammals can travel a long distance for a drink. So can some birds. Small lizards, snakes, and mice are different. They cannot travel far. They might **prefer** to drink from a stream or even a puddle, but these are rare treats in a desert. They find water in different ways. They get some from tiny drops of dew that form overnight on plants or stones. Their main source of water is the food they eat. Flowers, seeds, and leaves contain water. The bodies of insects, scorpions, and other animals are all at least half water. Some desert animals get most or all of the water they need simply by eating food.

### STOP AND CHECK

**Reread** What are some different ways that animals in the Mojave get water? Reread to find the answer.

This coyote can travel far to find water.



A photograph of a kangaroo rat with light brown and white fur, sitting on a sandy, light-colored ground. The rat is facing right, and its long tail is visible on the left. A yellow callout box with black text is positioned in the upper left area of the image.

Light-colored fur helps this kangaroo rat hide from predators.

## Light Colors Help

People who live in or visit deserts often wear light-colored clothes. This is smart because dark colors take in, or absorb, Sun energy, while light colors reflect it. You can avoid overheating by wearing light colors. Desert animals do the same by being light-colored.

Being light-colored can help animals in another way. In the Mojave, the land is often colored tan, gray, and light brown. Pale mice, insects, or lizards are hard to see against this background. This gives the animals some **protection** from predators that try to catch and eat them.

Not all desert animals are light-colored. In some parts of the Mojave, mice and lizards are much darker. They are different because they live among rocks and soil that are black or dark brown. In those places, darker colors help them hide and survive.

## Escaping the Heat

Desert animals are all alike in one way. They find ways to avoid midday heat. Different animals do this in different ways. Most of them rest during the hottest time of day. They are active in cooler times, such as mornings, evenings, or at night.

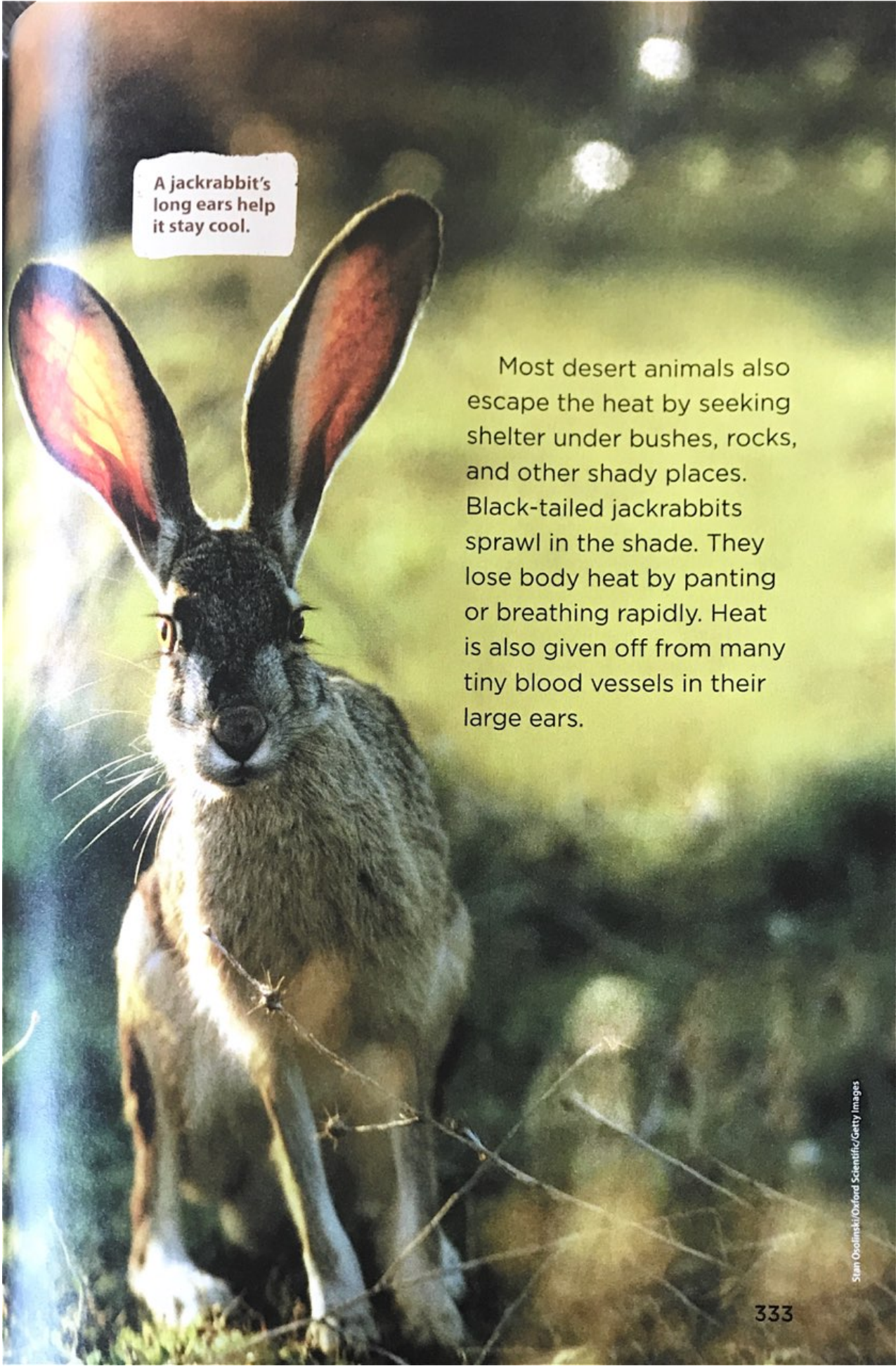
Different animals avoid heat in different ways. Scorpions usually hide in shady places. However, if a scorpion must be out in daytime, it can stand tall on its legs. This is called "stilting." It keeps the scorpion's body from touching the hot surface. A snake, of course, cannot "stilt" because it has no legs! On a hot day some snakes and lizards crawl up into bushes. There, the air is cooler than on the hot soil surface.

### STOP AND CHECK

**Reread** How do scorpions avoid the heat? Reread to find the answer.

A scorpion uses its legs to raise its body above the hot ground.



A black-tailed jackrabbit is shown in a natural, outdoor setting. The rabbit has long, upright ears that are a reddish-brown color on the inside. Its fur is a mix of grey and brown. The background is a soft-focus green and brown, suggesting a natural habitat. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the rabbit's fur and the details of its ears.

A jackrabbit's long ears help it stay cool.

Most desert animals also escape the heat by seeking shelter under bushes, rocks, and other shady places. Black-tailed jackrabbits sprawl in the shade. They lose body heat by panting or breathing rapidly. Heat is also given off from many tiny blood vessels in their large ears.

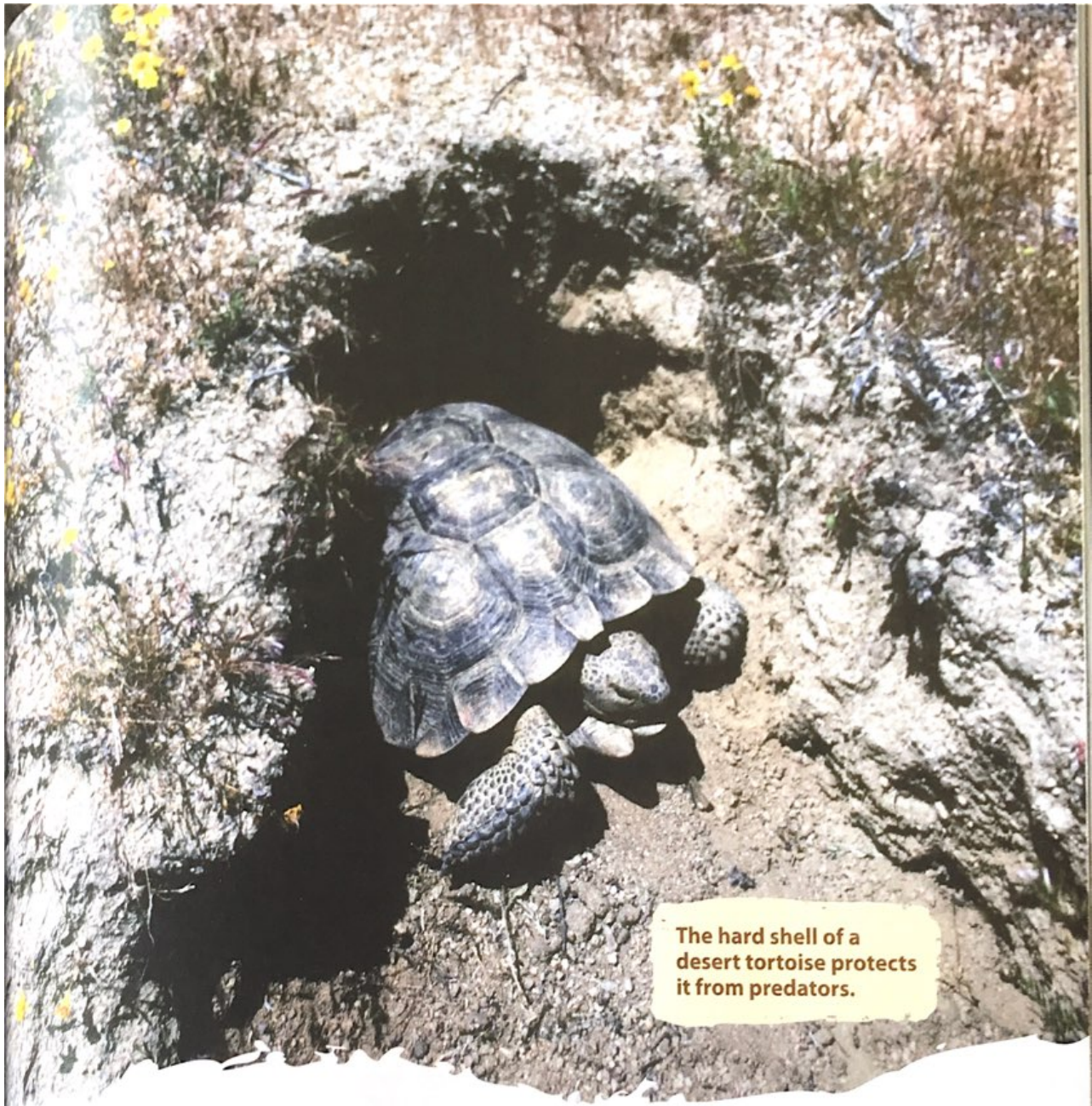


## Cool and Safe Underground

Many desert animals seek the coolness of underground burrows. The afternoon soil temperature may be as hot as 140 degrees F! Just a foot or two underground, the temperature might be 85 degrees. Burrows protect animals from heat and also from cold. Desert nights are often chilly. Winter snow sometimes falls in the Mojave.

Desert tortoises spend most of their lives in burrows they dig. They come out in the spring to eat plant leaves, flowers, and fruit. Because their burrows are big and often several feet long, there is room for other animals too. A tortoise burrow is an **excellent** hiding and resting place for kangaroo rats, rabbits, snakes, lizards, owls, and other small desert creatures. Some join a sleeping tortoise. Others use an abandoned burrow.





The hard shell of a desert tortoise protects it from predators.

Some desert animals also use their hideouts in a different way. In the evening, scorpions wait just inside their shelters for their next meal. A lizard, beetle, or even another scorpion might pass by. These moving animals make ground vibrations that scorpions can feel. The vibrations **alert** scorpions that an animal is nearby. Some scorpions can sense vibrations in the air caused by a flying insect. They can reach out and grab a low-flying moth!



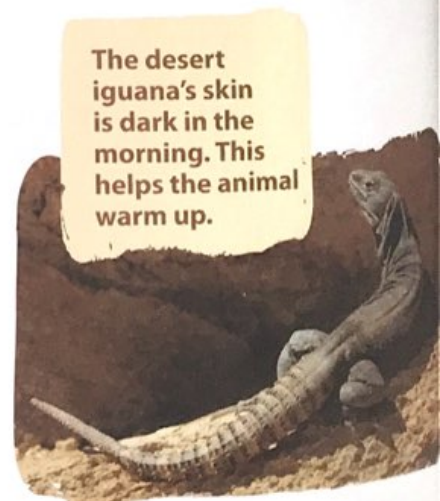
## Morning Warmth

Desert animals have many different ways to avoid overheating. Sometimes, however, they need to get warm! At night, the desert air is quite cool. By dawn, some animals need to warm up. Lizards and snakes crawl to a sunny place. They turn their bodies toward the Sun to raise their body temperature.

Desert iguanas have an amazing ability for warming and also for cooling. They change color! In the morning, their skin is dark. This helps them absorb heat from the Sun. Then the day gets hotter and hotter. By early afternoon the iguanas' skin has turned white, reflecting sunlight. Then, as the air becomes cooler in the evening, their skin darkens again.

### STOP AND CHECK

**Ask and Answer Questions** Why do desert iguanas change color? Reread the page to find the answer.



Like iguanas, some birds need to warm their bodies after a chilly night. Roadrunners turn their backs toward the Sun and raise their body feathers. Their skin is black. It absorbs Sun energy. When warm enough, roadrunners join in the **competition** for food. They dash to hunt for lizards and small snakes.



This roadrunner cools off in the shade of a tree.

Roadrunners live very well in deserts. Like all the other Mojave animals, they are wonderfully adapted to thrive in a dry, hot environment. So are scorpions, jackrabbits, chuckwallas, and tortoises. They all make the Mojave a lively, fascinating place.



After warming up, this roadrunner is ready to run fast to catch its prey.

(t) Ron N. Struggis; (b) Jimmy (b) Darrin Dellmont; Gallo Images/Getty Images

# About the Author

Growing up, **Laurence Pringle** loved to explore the outdoors—tramping through the woods, splashing through ponds and streams, and fishing in the ocean. His other strong interest was reading, so writing about nature made perfect sense. Among his other books are *Snakes! Strange and Wonderful*, *Come to the Ocean's Edge*, and *A Dragon in the Sky: The Story of a Green Darner Dragonfly*. When he's not writing, he still enjoys hiking and fishing.



## Author's Purpose

Why do you think the author calls the animals of the Mojave "amazing"?

