

The Amazing Sonoran Desert



A Mini Graphic Novel

By Veronica Murrell and the Conservation Education and Science Department
of the



Meet the Author/Artist, Veronica Murrell

When Veronica Murrell was a senior at BASIS Tucson North High School, she dreamed of the perfect Senior Internship project that combined her two passions: biology and art. She had just taken a class that introduced her to the ecology of the Sonoran Desert, and she was hooked. She contacted the Desert Museum's Conservation Education and Science Department about her vision – creating a non-fiction graphic novel on native plants and wildlife. Her pitch: graphic novels put information in an understandable and entertaining form

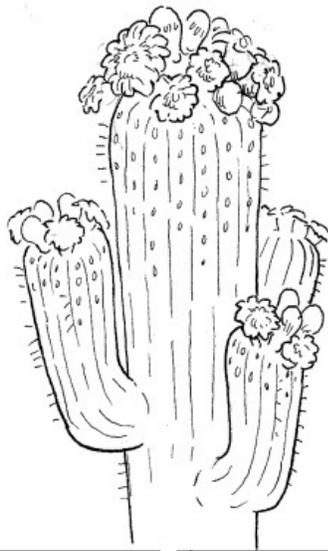
so that even young children can learn about this region. Her idea became a reality throughout the spring as Veronica participated in school and family programs, attended docent interpretations, and spent many hours observing and drawing desert life around the museum grounds. Her project focus became the biodiversity of the Sonoran Desert Region and plant/animal adaptations to the desert. This book you hold is her finished product! Thank you, Veronica, for your hard work and dedication to creating this wonderful resource for students to learn about the Sonoran Desert!



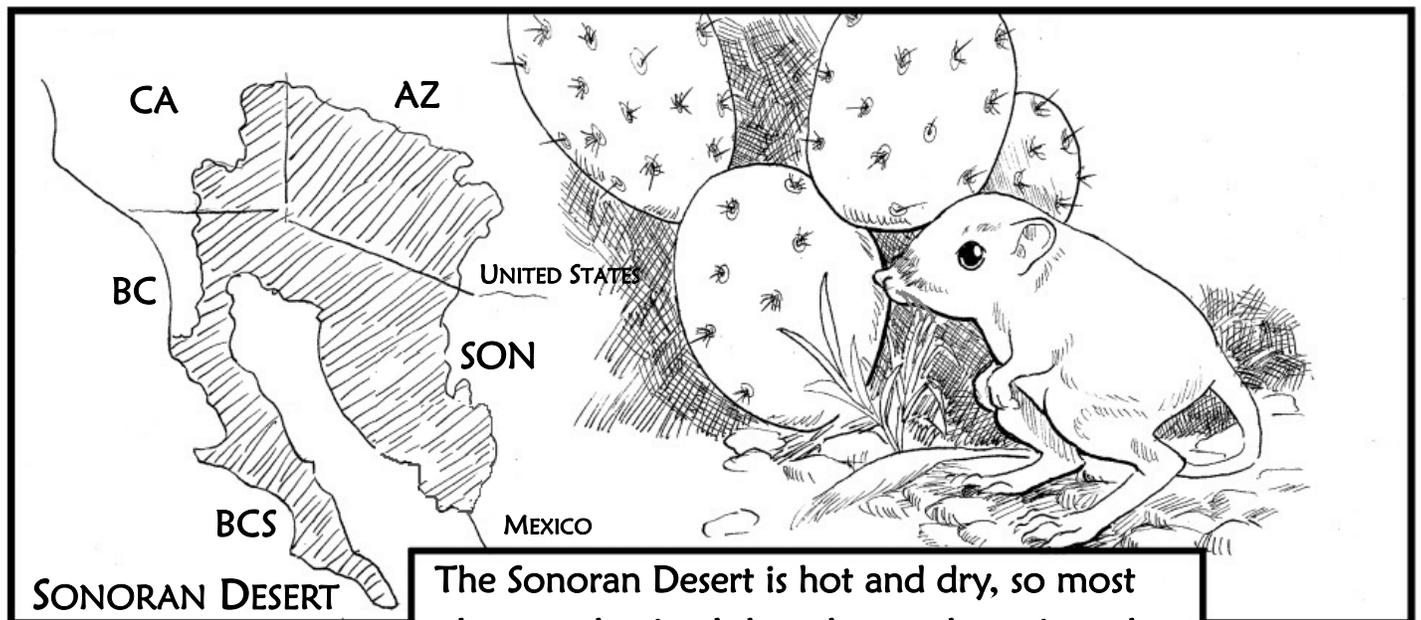
When brittlebush
rises from the
rocky soil,



cacti stand tall,



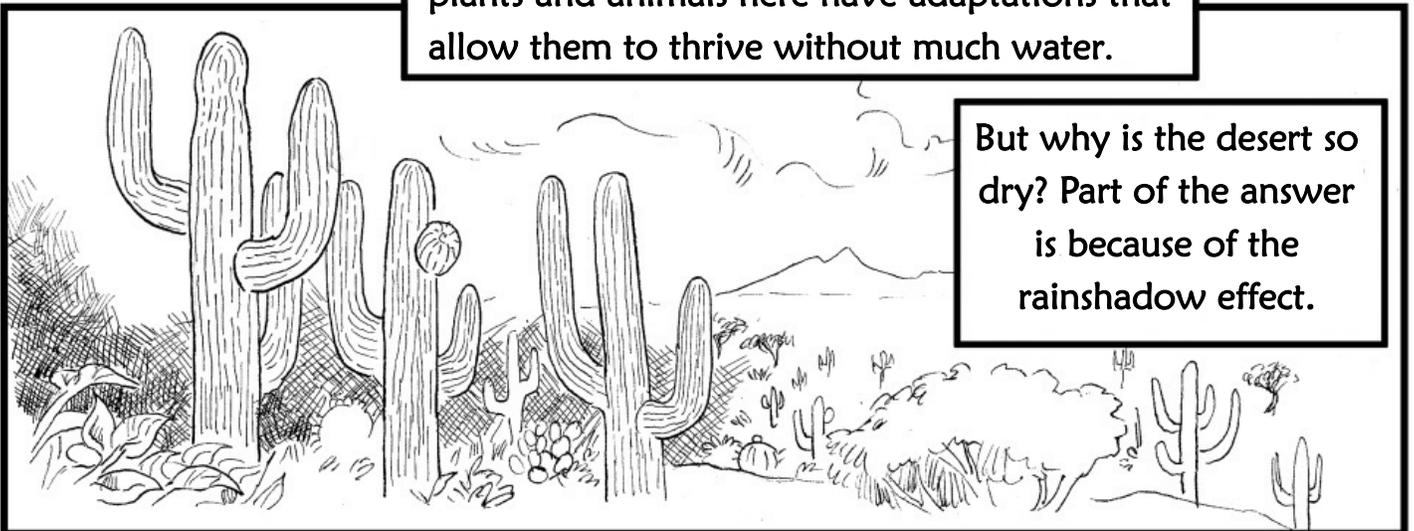
and green palo verde
trees offer shade, you
know you are in the
Sonoran Desert.



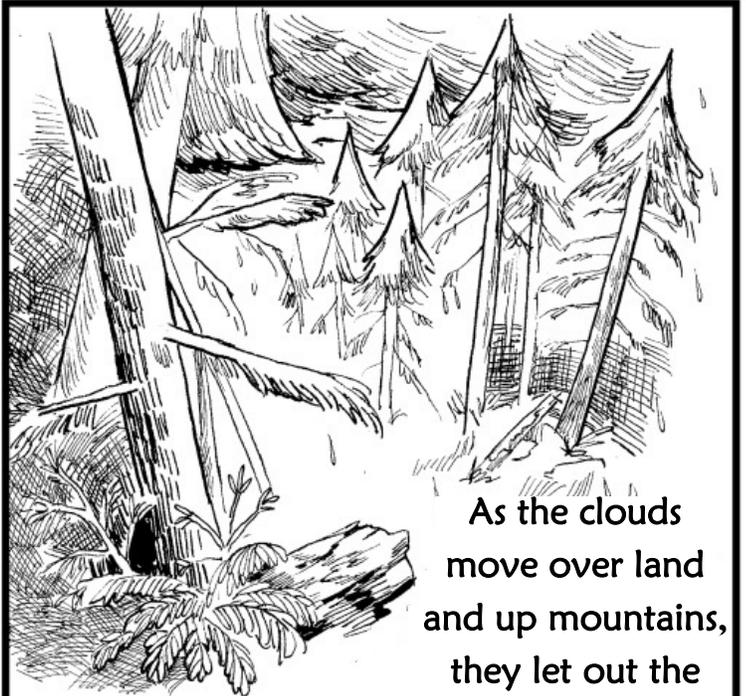
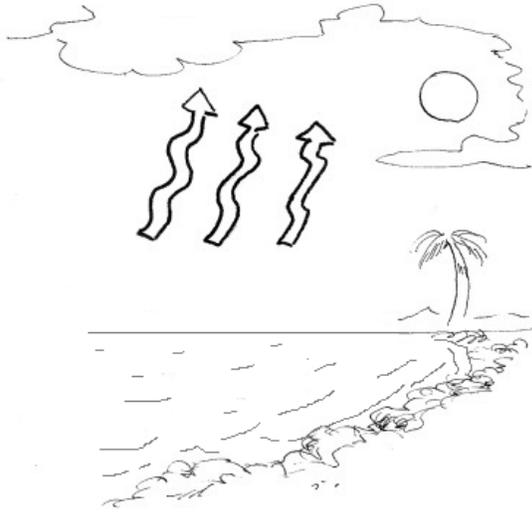
SONORAN DESERT

The Sonoran Desert is hot and dry, so most plants and animals here have adaptations that allow them to thrive without much water.

But why is the desert so dry? Part of the answer is because of the rainshadow effect.



Rain clouds form from ocean water in the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of California.



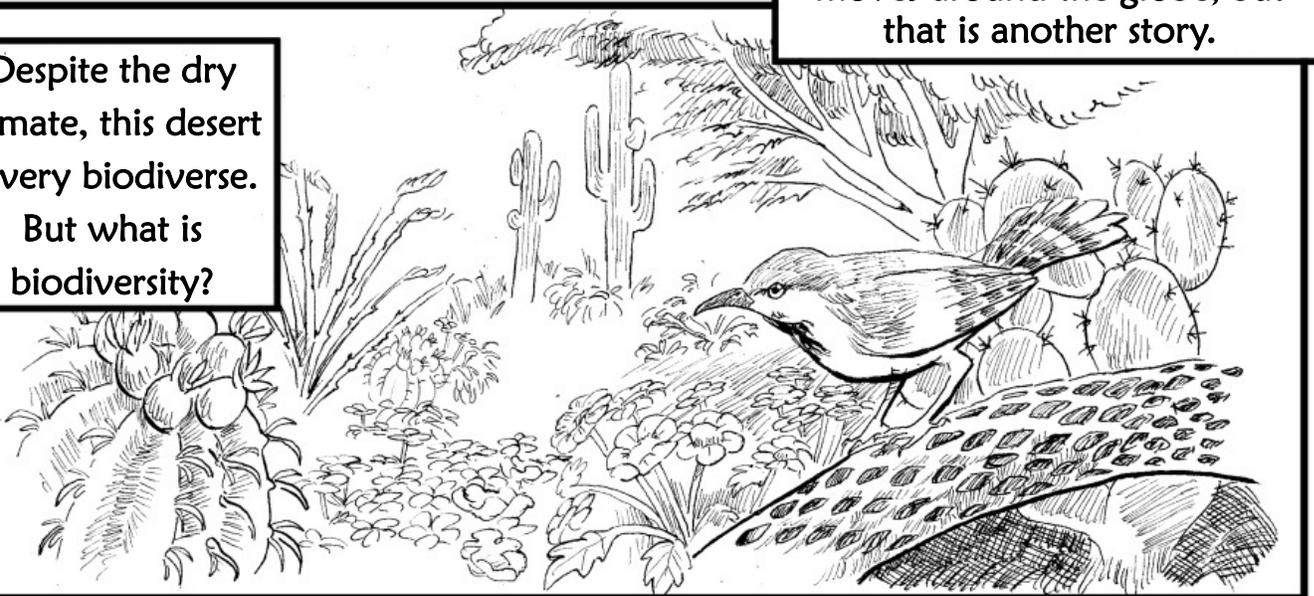
As the clouds move over land and up mountains, they let out the water as rain.

The mountains act like a wall and squeeze out all of the clouds' water before it can reach the desert.

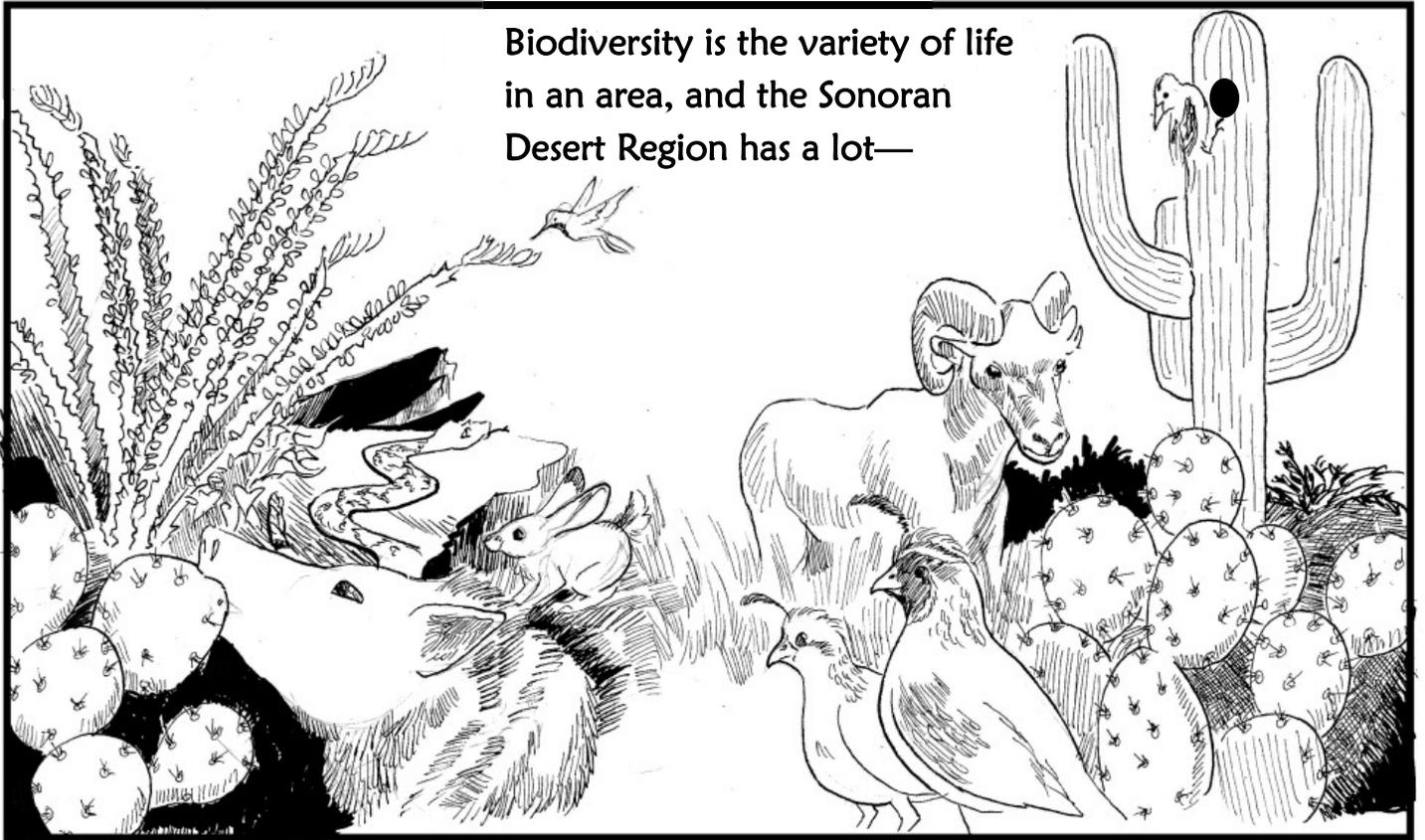


The other part of the answer has to do with how water moves around the globe, but that is another story.

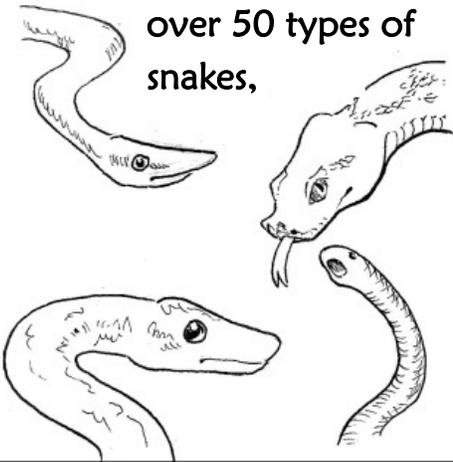
Despite the dry climate, this desert is very biodiverse. But what is biodiversity?



Biodiversity is the variety of life
in an area, and the Sonoran
Desert Region has a lot—



over 50 types of
snakes,



around 700 bee species,

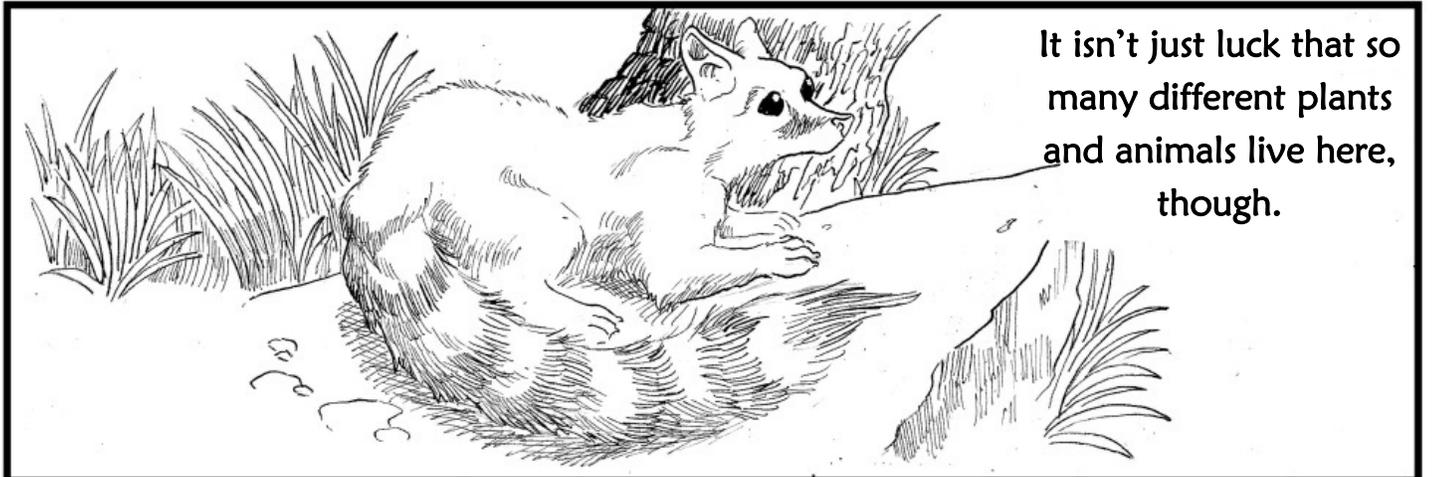


and 4 kinds of skunks,



just to name a few.

It isn't just luck that so
many different plants
and animals live here,
though.



There are three main reasons why this desert is so biodiverse—rainfall, habitat variety,



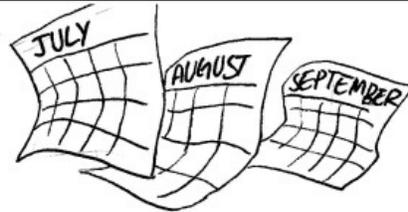
habitat variety,



and a mix of species from the north and south.

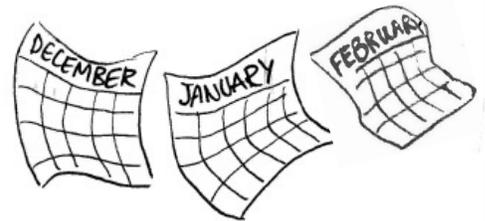


The Sonoran Desert gets more rain than other deserts.



It has two rainy seasons—one in the summer...

...and one in the winter.



All together the Sonoran Desert gets about 12 inches of rain a year, which makes it much easier for animals and plants to thrive here.

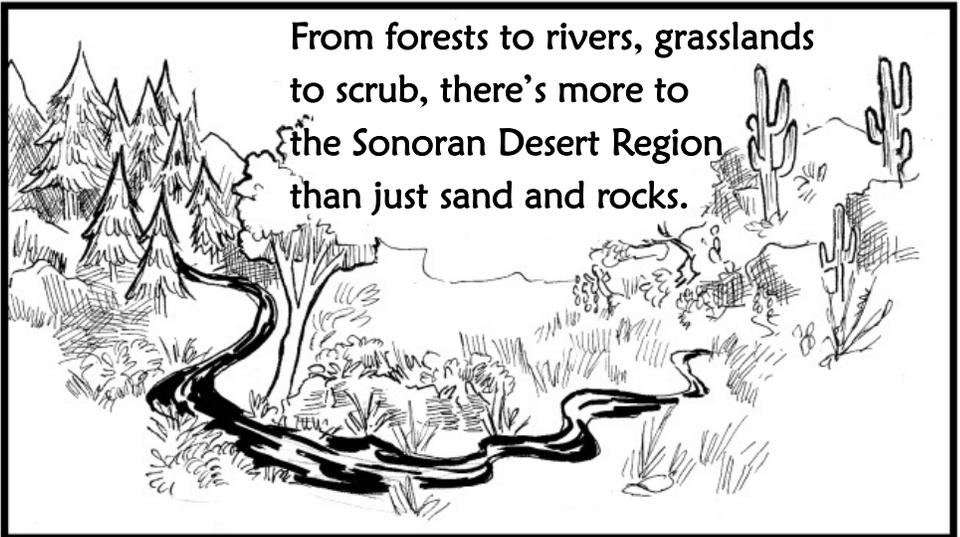




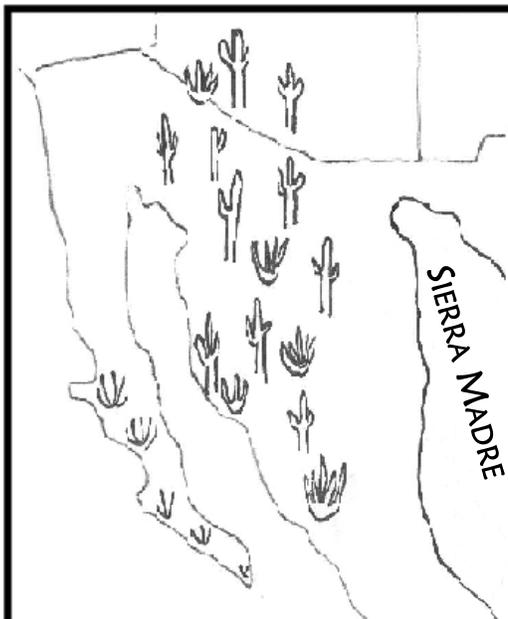
Second, the Sonoran Desert Region has many different habitats for a variety of plants and animals.



Mountains and canyons create cooler, wetter climates for living things to call home.



From forests to rivers, grasslands to scrub, there's more to the Sonoran Desert Region than just sand and rocks.



Coati



Jaguar and Ocelot



Thick-billed Parrot



Last, many tropical species reach the southern edge of the Sonoran Desert from Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains. Here they mix with temperate species from the north.

Even though these animals are more common in warmer, wetter areas, they live in the Sonoran Desert Region.

The Sonoran Desert is unique. It is more diverse than most deserts on the planet and has species you can't find anywhere else. It's a wide, wide desert out there, so get outside, explore, and learn more!

