However, with the arrival of monsoon, everything comes out to play! When it finally rains people celebrate, plants become green and lush, and wildlife comes out to quench their thirst.

The herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) of the Sonoran Desert are masters of this climate and have adapted to a life without the luxury of readily available water. Snakes, lizards, and amphibians have impressive adaptations that allow them to survive, and the resources that come with the monsoon season allow them to truly thrive.

Reptiles can go weeks and sometimes months without water, getting by with just the natural moisture from the food they eat. For example, snakes often eat just a couple times a month so the moisture they consume is pretty low. When the first rain of the season comes through, rattlesnakes will come out of hiding and coil up into a nice tight cinnamon bun, then carefully drink water droplets off their own skin. The arrival of monsoon season also prompts snakes, and many other desert animals, to find mates and reproduce. A rainy year means more plants and seeds, invertebrates, and mammals, which are overlapping resources for one another and food sources for snakes. A robust monsoon season usually translates to higher reproduction rates for reptiles, either that same season or the following year.

Gila monsters, an icon of the southwest, are found in abundance in the desert as they too enjoy the welcomed monsoon moisture. Gila monsters spend up to 90% of their entire lives underground because they have very porous skin. If they are in the heat too long, any natural moisture can evaporate through those pores making them susceptible to dehydration and desiccation. On the flip side, an advantage of this porous skin is that it’s easy to absorb moisture when it’s available. In fact, water droplets can sink directly into Gila monster skin!
The herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) of the Sonoran Desert are masters of this climate and have adapted to a life without the luxury of readily available water.

To see some of this wonderful wildlife, find a hiking trail (less foot traffic usually yields better results) and plan around the temperature. During the summer rainy season dawn and dusk are great times to spot reptiles, as they tend to avoid the hottest parts of the day.

Remember to keep an eye out as most reptiles use their camouflage to avoid detection. Amphibians also enjoy the evenings but can be seen in cool areas throughout the day if you have a keen eye.

Despite the impressive adaptations to survive in harsh desert conditions, the herpetofauna of the Sonoran Desert truly awakens, and thrives with the arrival of monsoon season. 

When it rains, it florals!

With the desert buzzing with activity and dripping with rainwater, monsoon season is one of the best times to get outside and go exploring. Take the time to look at the plants, recognize them in their supple forms, and relish the joy of seeing life thrive in a time where all its needs are met.

Of the four North American deserts, the Sonoran has the greatest diversity of life forms due specifically to its biannual rainfall. The Mojave receives primarily winter rainfall, the Chihuahuan summer, and the Great Basin precipitation primarily as snow, whereas the Sonoran receives two rainy seasons. This results in Sonoran Desert plants enduring shorter periods of drought, relatively shorter periods of freezing temperatures in the winter, and hosting many subtropical species.

With the onset of the summer rains, many plants that lay dormant for most of the year finally get their party clothes out, so to speak. Individual plants will look unfamiliar, having tripled their leaf size, looking plump and happy. Plants will be bursting in bright green foliage, soaking up sunlight and using that energy to put out new growth. Saguaro cacti will swell and grow taller with the rains. Vines will crawl through, up and over the surrounding plants, reaching for sunlight from under the new, dense canopy.

Annual plants rely on a slightly different approach. The seeds of summer annuals, such as summer caltrop, will be bursting in bright green foliage, soaking up sunlight and using that energy to put out new growth. Saguaro cacti will swell and grow taller with the rains. Vines will crawl through, up and over the surrounding plants, reaching for sunlight from under the new, dense canopy.

Many Sonoran Desert plants flower in the dry, early summer months in order to have viable seed ready to germinate during the July and August monsoon rainfall. A series of rainy days is critical to the establishment of seedlings and their ability to put on enough growth to survive the drought periods of the coming fall and next early summer. Some plants that rely on this are saguaros, creosote bush, and other long-lived species that can survive even if successful recruitment only happens once a century or so. Perennial shrubs can be both opportunistic and conservative. Desert globemallow will use the rain to put out growth and flower at the end of the monsoon season, whereas shrubs like brittlebush will go into flower anytime they have ample water, even though their usual flowering time is late winter.

Annual plants rely on a slightly different approach. The seeds of summer annuals, such as summer caltrop, will often feature a thick seed coat that prevents germination until enough rain events have saturated the soil. These plants must complete their entire lifecycle in one season, so they focus not only on growth but also on flowering and setting seed.

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Monsoon Season Song

Monsoon rains make us sing and shout!

VERSE 1
A
Winter seems so far away

E
Been so long since it has rained

A
So hot and dry I just want to cry

E
Hooray! Look, there’s some water

CHORUS
A
‘Cause it’s monsoon season in the desert

D
It’s monsoon season in the desert

A
Feels like it hasn’t rained in forever

E
But now it’s monsoon season in the desert

VERSE 2
A
Animals hiding underground

E
Come to the surface to look around

A
It finally rained, time to celebrate

E
The desert comes to life again!

CHORUS

VERSE 3
A
Toads and frogs dig out of the ground

E
To lay some eggs and find some food

A
Centipedes, millipedes, & beetles, too

E
All come up – it’s a critter zoo!

CHORUS

VERSE 4
A
Thirsty cactus is in luck

E
When there’s water to drink up

A
To save for later when they need it most

E
So the sun doesn’t burn them – like

A
A saguaro toast!

CHORUS

BRIDGE
D
Termites and ants come out for mating flights – oh, yeah!
E
Hoping they don’t get eaten by velvet mites – yum, yum!
D
Gila monsters emerge, what a special sight – wow!
B7
Vinegaroons love a good shower too
E
These storms are a delight! Oh...

CHORUS

OUTRO repeat 2x:
A
Monsoon season in the desert

CHORDS IN SONG: A, E, D, & B7. GUITAR:

Monsoon Season Song

Listen to the “Monsoon Season Song” and sing along with Nichelle!

www.desertmuseum.org/kids/music/

Monsoon rains make us sing and shout!

Grab your favorite instrument or sing along to celebrate life in the desert.

We love seeing the museum through your eyes!

Tag @desertmuseum and use #desertmuseum for a chance to be featured!

Listen to the “Monsoon Season Song” and sing along with Nichelle!

www.desertmuseum.org/kids/music/
This fund will allow the Museum to expand research, collaboration, and community engagement in our region. It will support the Museum’s work to understand and conserve native pollinators, and expand work to develop resilient food systems in the face of climate change. Learn all about the Desert Museum’s work on our website, found under "conserve" and in the recent blog post under “learn”!

The same foundation has also presented the Museum with a $1 million challenge, in which they have pledged to match all gifts in support of Conservation Education and Science from other donors like YOU, up to the total amount of $1 million! Imagine what this kind of commitment will do to advance the research and education initiatives of this institution!

The other grant is from another foundation which has also made a $1.6 million grant to Conservation Education and Science of the Sonoran Desert region! The same foundation has presented gifts in support of Conservation Education and Science from other donors like YOU, up to the total amount of $1 million! Imagine what this kind of commitment will do to advance the research and education initiatives of this institution!

There will be reminders throughout the summer for this campaign and the next one up is the Thirsty Thursdays Challenge. The challenge is to raise $500,000, and the foundation will match those dollars up to the full $500,000 if they hit that goal by the 20th of July.

To close this out, we would like to recognize the generous support of a group of donors who supported the Museum’s conservation and science initiatives this year through their gift with a note "for $1m match"!
BIRDS IN ART
June 24, 2022 – August 21, 2022.

From their lyrical birdsong to their migratory patterns, birds connect us to the rhythms of life. Since 1976, the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum has organized the Birds in Art exhibition annually, seeking to present the best contemporary artistic interpretations of avian themes.

IRONWOOD GALLERY HOURS
Sunday - Friday: 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Saturday: 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. & 5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

SUMMER ART CLASSES
Discover your talent...

Join us this summer for an art class! While the Museum will again have shortened summer hours into September, our class schedule will remain the same. Look for more morning classes offering plenty of chances to beat the heat.

TALL TAILS
May 21 - August 7, 2022

Tall Tails, by Mary Wilhelm
This exhibit features selections from the Fable Series, along with newer works of allegorical drawings and paintings based on the relationship between the Artist and the Animals. Throughout the work, there are subtle details and non-linear chronologies that take place in worlds resembling our own but in exaggerated ways.

BALDWIN GALLERY HOURS
Sunday - Friday: 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Saturday: 9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.