



Southern Nevada WILD

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The Southern Nevada Wild newsletter for educators and students can be found at www.ndow.org/learn/programs/region/south/index.shtm.

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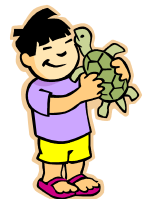
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The Collection of Wildlife

A popular activity for kids growing up in the desert is catching lizards. Why do people want to collect wildlife? There is something attractive about bringing elements of the natural world inside. Humans long for a bit of nature within their own surroundings. Plants bring a sense of peacefulness to us and wild animals bring a sense of adventure. Being able to witness a bit of the wild world up close allows us to observe, wonder, and understand a wider environment than what we are used to. Reptiles and amphibians are especially popular among collectors. Kids like to collect lizards and snakes for pets, and commercial dealers collect them to sell at pet stores. While legal collectors don't cause problems, unlicensed poachers who over-collect can seriously affect the reptile population in an area. The collection of certain species of wildlife in Nevada is allowed with a permit, and there are limits on how many individuals can be collected. Other species may not be collected at all. The method of capture also has to be approved. Collection should not be harmful to the animal or to the habitat. Remember that wild animals are an important part of the ecosystem.

If you're thinking about collecting any wildlife species, remember these things:

- Some wild-collected animals often don't live very long in captivity.
- It's better for the environment to buy a captive-bred animal from a pet store.
- Never, ever release a captive animal back into the natural environment. It could spread disease, or compete with the native population.
- Wildlife is best observed in its natural habitat.



Wildlife as Pets

Do wild animals make good pets? There are a number of species of wildlife that are perfectly okay to have as pets. These include captive-bred animals that are not collected from the wild, and also certain wild-collected animals that are legally obtained, usually with permits from Fish and Wildlife agencies. Most of these animals are birds, reptiles, or amphibians, and are available at reputable pet stores. But animals that are taken directly out of their native habitat (the "wild") and used as pets are not always the best choice. There are several reasons for this:

- Wild animals have adaptations that help them survive in their own unique environments. Specialized habitats are often hard to recreate. Wild animals also have complex behavioral, social and nutritional needs that can be difficult to provide.
- Taking them from the wild could endanger the species. The global demand for exotic pets is leading to the illegal capture and trade of millions of birds, mammals and reptiles, most of which die while being captured or transported.
- Wild means unpredictable, so keeping wild animals as pets can be dangerous. They can bite, scratch and attack their owners. Some animals are territorial and cannot be put with other pets.
- You could get sick if the wild animal is carrying a disease or parasite that is dangerous to humans.
- It could be illegal. Many state, county and city ordinances prohibit the ownership of wild animals as pets.

"A country is known by the way it treats its animals."

- Jawaharlal Nehru



Adapted from "Why Wild Animals Don't Make Good Pets," from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums



Roadrunner

What's that long lean bird running across the road? It's the Greater Roadrunner, and it doesn't stay on roads. Roadrunners are in the cuckoo family, which are birds that like to keep to the ground. The roadrunner is not flightless – it can fly, but not for long distances. Its streamlined body is shaped for running across the desert floor. The bird is very long, up to two feet from beak to tail. The long tail which is held horizontal to the ground when running, acts as a rudder to help steer its direction. Long legs carry it very swiftly. You might not be able to outrun the roadrunner when it speeds up to 17 miles per hour!

Roadrunner tracks are fun to find in sandy areas. But you won't know which way they are going. With two toes facing forward and two toes facing backward, the tracks look the same no matter which way they are traveling. What you'll see is a double line



Photo by Jim Boone

The toe direction forward and back help the bird to run, but it is also an adaptation for escaping predators that might be following the roadrunner tracks. Who preys on the roadrunner? - Hawks, raccoons, and coyotes. The roadrunner is also a predator, and can snatch a rattlesnake by the tail or a hummingbird out of midair. It also eats scorpions, rodents and other small birds. But its favorite food is the lizard.

The food it eats provides a good deal of the moisture that it needs, and it conserves this moisture within its body. Not much water is released in the feces, so excess salt comes out instead through its nose.

In the spring, roadrunners build their nests made of sticks in a low cactus or bush. Eggs don't all hatch at the same time, and the ones that hatch earliest have the best chance of surviving.

Environmental Ethics

There's a lot of talk about environmental ethics these days. First, we need to define what we mean by ethics. Ethics are a set of values that guide our conduct. Environmental ethics, then, are a code of responsibility to nature. Aldo Leopold first talked about a "land ethic," which would later develop into modern-day environmental ethics. His land ethic said that land is not only an ecological community, but is to be loved and respected. We have to look at ourselves as being part of the environment, and then we will value it. Valuing the environment means taking care of it. So we all need to do our part by keeping it clean and not destroying it. Basic environmental ethics include the following:

- Save energy. Turn off water and electricity when you're not using them.
- Avoid littering. Recycle. Pick up trash in public areas.
- Play gently on the soil. Try not to dig large holes or tear hills down. Watch out for animal homes.
- Take care around wildlife. Don't tease animals or harm them. Don't try to feed them.
- Respect plants that grow in natural areas. Don't step on them or pull them out of the ground. Try not to pick wildflowers.
- Leave things as you found them. Try not to bring home things that are part of the habitat. Don't deface rocks or move them out of place.
- Enjoy the beauty of natural places!



Desert Horned Lizard



Photo by Jim Boone

Horned lizards are also called horned toad lizards or horny toads, but they're not toads at all. These odd-looking lizards are actually related to iguanas. Their broad, flattened bodies make them appear like frogs or toads, and they are about the same size. They also have a short tail and horns, or spines on top of their head and on their back, something like a little dinosaur. The desert horned lizard lives throughout the state of Nevada, except in the Sierra Mountains.

Horned lizards have wonderful camouflage. They match the colors of the soil so well, that predators are often fooled when the horned lizard stands still – it seems to disappear into the ground. If the predator should catch one, the lizard may blow itself up with air and appear like a spiny ball. Finally, the horned lizard can squirt acidic-tasting blood out from the corners of their eyes in an effort to be released.

In springtime, horned lizards come out from hibernation or brumation, and spend their days warming up with their backs tilted toward the sun. Then they forage for ants, their primary food. They spend the later part of the day seeking shade and burying themselves in the sand with their horned heads acting as little plows.

These little creatures can live 5 to 8 years in the wild, but in captivity they will die quickly. The reason for this is that they have to eat a great number of a certain species of ants. It is also difficult to provide the right habitat for them. If you really want to see one up close, please be careful and be sure to release it back to its home.

Lizard Tales



Most lizards have an adaptation of dropping their tail as a means of getting away from a predator. The tail breaks off at a natural weak point in the tail vertebrae. Kids who grow up in the desert know that when they catch a lizard with their hand, they are often left holding just the tail. Sometimes the tail piece is left twitching, which distracts the predator while the lizard runs to safety. Lizard tails are used for balance and locomotion, to play a part in social status and in some species to store fat reserves. The regrowth of the tail is costly - with all the animal's energy being directed toward the new growth, any other growth as well as reproduction slows down temporarily. Regenerated tails have no cartilage or bones, and they do not always have the color and markings of the original. They can, however, be detached again.

Project Wild & Webfoot

The Project Wild teacher trainings in Clark County are scheduled for two consecutive Saturdays, September 20 and 27, 2008. The Aquatic Wild trainings are scheduled for Saturday, October 18 and 25. Attendance is required on both days in order to receive one school district PDE credit for each workshop. There will also be a special Aquatic Wild—Project Webfoot class for 1/2 credit on Saturday, November 15. Participation is limited to twenty people for each of these workshops, so sign up through Pathlore early. If the class is full, keep trying! Some folks have even been able to sign up the day before the workshop due to cancellations. If you're looking for outdoor nature activities to incorporate into your classes, these trainings are for you! Remember, Wild activities can be correlated to any subject: art, math, reading, science, social studies, even physical education! Wild is not just another curriculum to add on top of district requirements, but rather a sourcebook of new ideas that utilize nature as the teaching tool.

Note to Nye and Lincoln County educators: Project Wild is coming to you, too!



Project **WILD**

PROJECT
Webfoot



A program of

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Saying Good-bye to Mojave Max

A popular wildlife resident of southern Nevada died on June 30, 2008. Mojave Max was a desert tortoise that resided at the Red Rock Canyon Visitor Center and helped educate thousands of children and adults about desert ecology. The desert tortoise is a threatened species and represents the fragility of the desert ecosystem. Mojave Max came to Red Rock Canyon in 1991. Ever since then, people have visited him at a special tortoise enclosure, which demonstrated typical tortoise habitat and interactions between several desert tortoises. The Mojave Max education program was started by the Red Rock Interpretive Association in 2000. The program brings awareness of “respecting, protecting, and enjoying” the desert that surrounds the Las Vegas valley. Representatives from Clark County say that the emergence contest will go on, with a successor to the original Mojave Max being chosen by the fall of this year. More information on the Mojave Max program is available at www.mojavemax.com.

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Wildlife Treasure Hunt

Fall is a popular time to go on a treasure hunt. There are many things to find in the fall. Often wildlife will leave little treasures behind, telling us that they have been there. This activity does not involve the collection of natural items, especially in parks and on other public lands. You should only check off the items on the list when you find them. Don't disturb them. Take along a bag and pick up trash as you go. Dispose of trash in the proper place when you get back.

1. Animal tracks – what kind of animal are they from?
2. Web
3. Scat
4. Bird's nest - be quiet when you observe one!
5. Feather
6. Burrow – don't get too close
7. Butterfly on a flower – what kind of flower?
8. Bird call – this is a **sound** you will have to listen for
9. Watering hole – can be any source of water an animal could drink from
10. Young animal – young or babies are usually near their parents
11. Bedding – a place where an animal may have rested, usually with an indentation in the ground or vegetation
12. Nibbled plants
13. Lizard – usually running by
14. Insect – any kind will do
15. Flying bird

Answers:

Food – butterfly on flower, nibbled plants, insect
 Water – watering hole
 Shelter – bird's nest, burrow, bedding
 Space – lizard running by, bird flying in the air

After you've completed the treasure hunt, can you name four of the items that make up an animal's **habitat**?

Clue: food, water, shelter and space.