



Wildlife



The common raven thrives in a variety of environments: from treeless tundras to the high desert around Hovenweep National Monument.

History

Hovenweep National Monument is located on Cajon Mesa in the heart of the Great Sage Plain which stretches from Cortez, CO to Blanding, UT. Big game such as mammoths, mastodons, and giant sloths may have originally brought humans to this region as early as 15,000 B.C. However, the first evidence of people on Cajon Mesa dates from around 8,000 B.C. What ensued was a gradual transition from hunting and gathering to a more sedentary agricultural lifestyle. Clearing woodlands for agriculture may have reduced elk and turkey populations and hunting may have impacted other large game animals such as the bighorn sheep. Conversely, agricultural land may have enhanced habitat for smaller animals such as rabbits. By A.D. 600 the use of the bow and arrow began, a technological advance that aided in the hunting of smaller game.

Today there is abundant wildlife at Hovenweep with more than 10 species of bats, 13 species of rodents, 11 species of lizards, 10 species of snakes, and 90 species of birds recorded within the park's 785 acres. Rodents and bats comprise the majority of the mammals found here because they are so well adapted to the harsh desert climate. Many of the rodents are active burrowers spending the hotter, drier hours of the day underground. Bats utilize canyon walls, cracks, and overhangs as daytime roosts. The heat radiated at night by these same walls provides an ideal temperature for the bats to fly and forage in. Cold blooded reptiles like snakes and lizards also thrive here, letting the abundant sunlight keep their bodies warm. Birds flourish by taking advantage of wetter microhabitats such as stream beds and springs.

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Coyote

Though you may have difficulty spotting one, listen for the howls, barks, whines, and yips of the coyote. While their calls may send a shiver up your spine, these creatures are not to be feared and are likely more afraid of you! Their soul-piercing howls communicate location within a group or family. Other vocalizations may defend territory, call for pups, and protect dens. Coyotes are some of the most adaptable creatures in the world. While they were originally found in the northwest U.S., coyotes now occur everywhere in the continental U.S., successfully taking over the former range of their cousin and major predator, the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*).



Coyote (*Canis latrans*).

Desert Cottontail

Watch for cottontails hiding in the brushy desert scrub. Cottontails are named for the white patch of fur on their tail that resembles a cotton ball. They raise this white tail when danger is near, serving as an alarm signal to other cottontails. These rabbits can run up to 20 mph in a zig-zag pattern to escape predators! Cottontails belong to the order of mammals called rodents - a group of animals whose teeth never stop growing! Rabbits use their sharp ever-growing teeth to nibble twigs and grasses- their favorite foods. These furry critters keep themselves cool in the hot desert sun by radiating body heat through their large ears.

Tarantula Hawk

This large wasp with a metallic blue-black body and orange wings can grow up to 3 inches long. Tarantula hawks (*Pepsis sp.*) are so named because, other than humans, they are the tarantula's main predator. When a female is ready to lay her eggs she finds a tarantula, attacks, stings, and paralyzes it so that she can drag it back to its burrow. There she lays a single egg on the tarantula's abdomen, exits the burrow, and seals the chamber. When the egg hatches the tiny grub feeds on the tarantula until fully grown by which time the spider is dead. Watch out for these powerful insects! They are much more venomous than the tarantula they hunt and have one of the most painful stings of any insect around.

Raven

The largest bird of the crow (Corvid) family, ravens stand up to a foot tall! Ravens are considered among the most intelligent of all birds. They can learn to imitate a variety of sounds including the human voice and their curious,

observant nature will be apparent to anyone who takes the time to notice. Ravens have a diverse appetite which can include carrion, mice, lizards, small birds, snakes, insects, and berries. Perhaps it is their broad diet that allows them to thrive in a number of different habitats ranging from treeless tundras to mountain forests to the desert canyons here at Hovenweep.

Whiptail lizard

Look for these lizards darting and dashing around in search of food during summer days. Unlike most lizards which employ the "sit-and-wait" hunting method, whiptails are active foragers. These lizards are easy to identify as their tail is up to 2.5 times as long as their body! Whiptails flick their forked tongues out into the air an average of 460 times an hour. The Jacobson's organ, a chemosensory organ found in many types of animals, sends vital information about food, courtship, and communication directly from the tongue to the brain.

Protect the past for the future

Your help is needed to preserve Hovenweep National Monument. There are several things you can do to preserve and protect Hovenweep for future generations:

- Stay on designated trails and away from fallen walls and mounds of stone. Walking on or near walls and structures weakens them, accelerating their deterioration.
- Areas behind chain barriers are closed to protect fragile sites. Do not cross these barriers.
- Look but do not touch. The oils from your hands permanently stain rock surfaces.

- Take photographs; do not take artifacts. Any person who excavates, removes, damages, alters, or defaces any archeological resource on federal lands is subject to arrest and felony prosecution as dictated by the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.
- Eat at picnic tables only. Do not eat or leave trash at archaeological sites. Food attracts rodents that will burrow and build nests in fragile structures.
- Pets are allowed on trails but must be on a leash at all times.

Protect Yourself

- Bring enough water for yourself and your pets.
- Wear sunscreen and hat; rest often.
- Respect the wildlife. Venomous insects and snakes live in the Southwest.
- Do not eat plants. Some may be poisonous.