



Surviving the Desert

This information is precautionary. Only qualified individuals should administer first aid. In the event of a bite or sting from any poisonous creature, seek medical advice as soon as possible.

Reptiles



There are four venomous snake species at Tonto National Monument: the Western Coral Snake and three species of rattlesnake – Western Diamondback, Arizona Black, and Blacktail. Non-venomous snakes in the area include the Gopher, King, and Whipsnake. Lizard species include Horned Lizards, Banded Geckos, and Gila Monsters – one of only two venomous lizards in the world. Reptiles are often a visitor's main concern in the desert, but most of these animals are rarely seen.

Spiders and their Kin



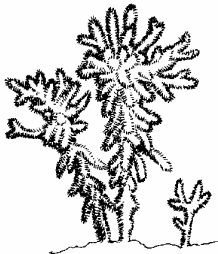
For the most part, centipedes, scorpions, and spiders feed at night. If you happen to encounter one during the day, give it the right-of-way. Centipedes are about as poisonous as a wasp. Black Widow spider bites should be treated by a physician. Most scorpions are not very dangerous, however, the sting of the bark scorpion is potentially life threatening. Tarantulas look dangerous, but their bite is no worse than a bee sting.

Stinging Insects



Tonto National Monument is home to many insects, including bees, wasps, and hornets. Honeybees live in the caves and crevices along the trails. Wasps and hornets are rarely encountered on the Lower Cliff Dwelling Trail, but may be in the riparian area of the Upper Cliff Dwelling Trail. If you are allergic to insect stings, plan accordingly. Bees, wasps, and hornets are all attracted to sugar, so it is a good idea to carry water instead of sodas.

Desert Plants



Agave, Teddy Bear Cholla, and Prickly Pear are but a few of the desert's many spiky plants. If a thorn sticks you, wash the wound and apply a bandage. If the spine is still imbedded, remove it with tweezers and cleanse the wound. Because of the chance of infection, it is a good idea to seek medical advice. Legends tell of surviving in the desert off the moisture stored inside plants. Many of these plants are poisonous; always carry water when hiking in the desert.

Heat Related Illnesses

Between 1936 – 1975, nearly 20,000 people were killed in the U.S. by heat. The temperature of the human body is regulated within extremely narrow limits and when the system is stressed, it may cause heat cramps, heat exhaustion, or heat stroke. **Anyone suffering from a heat related problem should seek medical help.**

Heat cramps are characterized by painful muscle spasms, usually in the legs and abdomen. Get the victim to rest in a cool place. Give them water unless nausea occurs.

The usual signs of heat exhaustion are cool, pale, moist skin; heavy sweating; dilated pupils; headache; nausea; dizziness, and vomiting. Get the victim out of the sun and have them lie down. Clothing should be loosened and the body cooled. Give sips of water unless nausea or vomiting continues.

Heat stroke is characterized by a temperature of 105°F or higher. The skin is dry, hot, and red; the pupils will be constricted. This is a serious medical emergency. Get medical help immediately.

Reducing the effects of the Heat

Hiking in the desert can be a wonderful experience if the proper precautions are taken.

- * Eat lighter foods. A diet high in fat creates metabolic heat, and uses more water for digestion.
- * Slow down. Strenuous activities should be reduced, eliminated, or rescheduled to cooler parts of the day.
- * Take things easy, and become acclimated to the warmer weather.
- * Every minute spent in the sun contributes to the development of skin cancer and other problems. Even so, it is not totally necessary to avoid the sun.
- * Select a sunscreen with at least SPF 15, and apply it throughout the day.
- * Sunscreen is especially important while on, or near, the water. The surface glare can cause serious sunburn even if you are in the shade.
- * Apply sunscreen to your face and hands even if you are wearing a hat and long sleeves.
- * Light-colored clothing reflects sunlight and helps maintain normal body temperatures.
- * Sunglasses are a good idea, since prolonged exposure to the sun can eventually damage the eyes.
- * Your body needs water to keep it cool. Drink plenty of non-alcoholic, non-caffeine fluids, even if you don't feel thirsty.

