



Fun Facts for Dune Life Nature Trail

When hiking the Dune Life Nature Trail, many of the answers to the field notebook can be found by reading the exhibits. These 'fun facts' will help you answer the other questions in the Field Notebooks.

Animal Facts:

- Over 300 plants, 250 birds, 50 mammals, 30 reptiles, 7 amphibians, and 1 fish species call White Sands National Monument their home.
- White animal species found at White Sands include 3 reptiles, 1 amphibian, 3 mammals, and numerous insects.
- Five species are endemic, meaning they are only found here at White Sands and not anywhere else on earth. White Sands endemic species include: Apache pocket mouse, White Sands woodrat, bleached earless lizard, and two camel crickets.
- Animals that live in the white dunes need to blend into the environment in order to survive. Lighter colored animals have a better chance of surviving because they are camouflaged. Any animals that are dark colored stand out against the white sands and are usually eaten. Lighter color keeps them cooler, which allows them to forage longer during the day.
- In an extreme environment like White Sands, the species must adapt or die. The bleached earless lizard is a great example of adaptation: lighter colored skin to match the sand, longer toes to better run in loose sand, and special eyelids that act as sunglasses against the bright sun.
- When they are not threatened, lizards drag their tail when walking on the sand. When in danger, lizards raise their tail as they run from a predator. Other animals with tails such as the pocket mouse, kangaroo rat, jackrabbit, and kit fox walk or run through the sand with their tails up.
- Snakes eat a variety of animals such as: insects, lizards, pocket mice, kangaroo rats, baby birds, other small mammals, fish, snails, and other snakes.
- Warm blooded animals have the ability to keep their bodies at a constant temperature no matter the outside environment temperature (e.g.: humans, coyote, kit fox). Cold blooded animals take on the temperature of their surroundings and require less energy to survive (e.g.: lizards, snakes).



Apache pocket mouse



Bleached earless lizard



Diamondback rattlesnake

- For birds, the dunefield is a giant grocery store. They find a variety of foods to eat in the dunes. Shrikes usually eat insects, lizards, and seeds from plants. Sparrows eat insects, and orioles will eat lizards. The ravens feast on dead animals (carrion).

- Predators are animals that hunt other animals for food. Examples of predators are owls, coyotes, kit foxes, and snakes. Prey are animals that are attacked and eaten. Examples of prey are insects, mice, snakes, and kit foxes. Depending on the food chain in a specific environment, an animal can be both predator and prey like the kit fox. The kit fox hunts mice and lizards, but is also hunted by the great horned owl.

- Prolific breeders are organisms (plants or animals) that produce numerous offspring or young. Examples of prolific breeder are rabbits, hares, mice, rats, minnows, and yucca.

Dune Facts:

- The White Sands dunefield is less than 10,000 years old.
- Depth of gypsum sand across the entire field is 30 feet below interdunal surface.
- The highest dunes in White Sands are approximately 60 feet high.
- The area of monument is 225 square miles (143,733 acres), approximately one quarter the size of Rhode Island. About 40% of the dunefield (115 square miles) is within monument boundaries.
- The White Sands dunefield has four types of dunes: dome dunes, transverse dunes, barchan dunes, and parabolic dunes.
- Highest point in the monument is 4116 feet at North East 30, which is a former military installation. Lowest point in the monument is 3887 feet at Lake Lucero.
- When filled with water, Lake Lucero covers approximately 10 square miles at a depth of 2 to 3 feet.

Monument Facts:

- Mammoth footprints on the Alkali Flat were discovered as early as 1932. Many more mammoth trackways have been discovered since that time.
- Herbert Hoover established White Sands National monument on January 18, 1933 by presidential proclamation.
- The first superintendent was Tom Charles. He actively promoted the creation of the monument and served as superintendent from 1934 to 1939.
- The adobe visitor center and adjacent historic structures were completed in 1938 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA).



Great Horned Owl



Plants survive moving dunes



Mammoth Tracks



Visitor Center