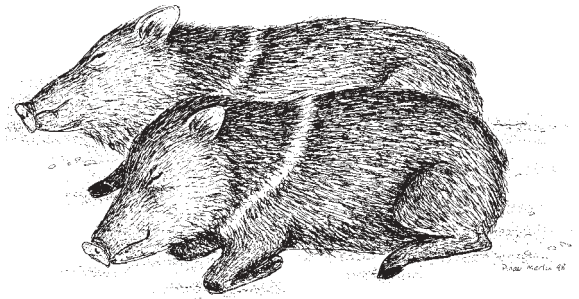




Javelina



Of all the fascinating animals in the Sonoran Desert, perhaps the most appealing is the javelina, or collared peccary. Originally from South America, javelinas migrated north into the southwestern United States during the last century. Although javelinas may superficially resemble wild boars and domestic pigs, these species of animals are not closely related.

Characteristics

Built low and close to the ground, javelinas stand about 18 inches tall and are between 32 and 36 inches long. An average adult weighs 40 to 60 pounds. Their tiny hooves have four toes in front and three toes in back.

They have coarse salt-and-pepper fur with a band of white around the neck, giving the appearance of a collar. A mane of darker hair on the back of the neck and shoulders will bristle when the animal faces danger.

Javelinas have an excellent sense of smell, average hearing, and poor eyesight. Their sensitive pink noses help them locate underground roots as well as a nearby predator.

A scent gland located just above the short tail gives off a strong, musky odor. Members of a herd often stand head to rump and rub their necks on their herd mate's scent gland. This behavior enables all herd members to quickly identify one another or a strange smelling stranger.

The basic social unit is the herd, which has an average of 12 individuals. Members of a herd mark their territory by rubbing their scent glands on rocks, shrubs and trees. Each herd needs an area of about 750 acres, in which there will be a network of trails leading to water, food and shelter.

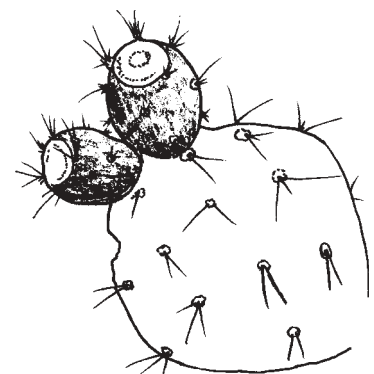


Food and Shelter

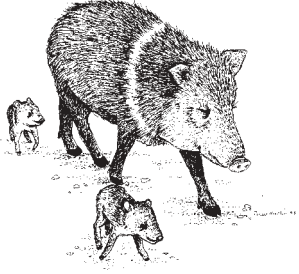
Javelinas are active during the cooler parts of the day; in the summer, this means early morning and early evening. They prefer large trees, caves and rocky overhangs to get away from the midday sun and to hide from predators.

Chiefly vegetarian, javelinas feed on a variety of desert plants, cactus stems, pads and fruits, agave hearts, mesquite beans, jojoba nuts, roots and flowers. An occasional insect or bird egg may be added to the menu.

One of the javelina's favorite foods is the prickly pear cactus. They use their sharp, two inch long canine teeth to shred and consume the pads, spines and all. During late summer the fruits begin to ripen and like many desert animals, javelina eat them



Family Matters



Babies may be born in any season, after a gestation period of 5 months. Babies are usually born during the summer rainy season when food is more plentiful. Females can have two litters per year. Twins are most common, although a single baby or triplets are also possible.

The babies weigh one pound at birth and after the first day, are able to walk and follow the herd. After nursing for eight weeks, they begin eating solid food.

The reddish-brown babies are miniature versions of their parents. They are very vocal as they follow the adults, grunting and squealing for food and attention.

An afternoon nap provides the perfect time for the little ones to play. While the adults sleep, the babies enjoy climbing on top and then sliding down the backs of the grownups. The adults are very patient with the babies, but will give them a warning when they have had enough.

The entire herd will defend the youngsters against predators. A baby who strays from the safety of the herd may become a bobcat or coyote meal.

Javelinas and People

Saguaro National Park preserves important Sonoran Desert habitat for a variety of animals, including many herds of javelina.

In the wild, javelinas have a natural fear of humans. When given the chance, they will run away if people get too close. If an animal feels cornered or is protecting its young, it can act aggressively towards people or their pets.

If you come across a baby javelina that you think is abandoned, leave it! Most likely, the mother was frightened away by your approach. She will return to her youngster once you have gone.

Viewing javelinas is best done from a distance. Binoculars will give you a close-up look. A camera with a telephoto lens will help you get that special picture.

Hand feeding of any wildlife can cause that animal to lose its fear of humans and may encourage it to aggressively seek out humans and their food. Urge your neighbors not to put out food for javelinas. When they come into your yard, they can do a lot of damage, including tearing up flowerbeds and getting into garbage.

Please resist feeding any native wildlife. Human food is not good for javelinas or other wild creatures, nor do they require our food to supplement their diet. The desert truly provides everything they need!

