

## The Story of a Kangaroo Rat



Daytime temperatures in California's Mojave Desert reach scorching heights. To beat the heat, a kangaroo rat rests comfortably inside the burrow he carefully excavated beneath a towering cactus plant. He knows that in the daytime, it's cooler underground than above. The kangaroo rat is nocturnal, which means that he sleeps all day and is active at night. Kangaroo rats are very active. They cover a lot of ground in a single night. The rat waits for nightfall when the outside temperatures drop and he won't overheat.

The kangaroo rat exits his burrow just as the moon rises in the sky. His large and powerful hind legs support his whole body. He moves about by hopping on them. His front legs are shorter, smaller, and weaker. He uses them more like arms. As he jumps out into the night, he looks just like a tiny kangaroo.

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The kangaroo rat hops off into the night in search of seeds, his main diet. The seeds in the Mojave Desert tend to be very small. He stuffs hundreds of them in his cheek pouches at one time. He uses his cheek pouches like shopping bags to carry his food home with him. Back at home, the rat uses his front paws to push the seeds out of his mouth. Then he covers the seeds with sand.

The kangaroo rat may be asleep most of the day, but he is not unaware. Kangaroo rats have sharp hearing and sensitive noses. If he hears a small noise, he'll jump up, wide awake. Tonight he hears a small scraping noise coming from above. He sniffs the air—it's a snake! If the snake comes inside his burrow, he'll be doomed. He goes outside to defend his burrow and try to scare the slithering serpent away.

It's a gopher snake. The kangaroo rat warns the snake by stomping his foot. Stomp, stomp, stomp. Stomp, stomp, stomp. Nope, that's not working. Time to up his game. The kangaroo rat uses his strong hind legs to kick sand in the snake's face. Sand in the eyes hurts. The snake doesn't like that at all. The snake slithers away. The kangaroo rat is safe for another day. Victorious, the rat returns to his burrow to eat his buried seeds for the night.

