



Common Mammals of White Sands



NPS historic photo of a coyote catching a mouse

While visiting White Sands National Monument, it is very unlikely that you will see any of our resident mammals. They have adapted to the hot summers of the Tularosa Basin by hiding in their dens until it cools down, leaving behind only their footprints from their nightly hunting.



Pallid Bat
Antozous pallidus

Pallid bats can be found roosting in many areas, such as the visitor center. They are identified by their large ears and light-colored fur. These winged mammals can eat insects in the air like other bats, but locate most of

their food on the ground while walking around. Their large ears help them to hear their prey's footsteps. They eat insects like scorpions and crickets, but also lizards and rodents.



Apache Pocket Mouse
Perognathus flavescens Apachii

The Apache pocket mouse is an endemic subspecies to White Sands and is one of the few residents of the dunes. It is named for the large fur lined pockets in their cheeks that hold hundreds of seeds when the mouse forages. It is light in coloration, which

helps it blend with the sand. It is a favorite snack of the kit fox. The Apache pocket mouse extracts all of its water from the food it digests. It can go its entire life without ever drinking water.



Kangaroo Rat
Dipodomys spectabilis

The kangaroo rat has a few tricks to help escape predators. It uses its long hind legs to distance itself from potential predators. While running, the kangaroo rat will use its long tail as a rudder to change direction suddenly. Mainly found in vegetated areas of the

monument, the kangaroo rat is 13 inches in length, eight of which are its tail. This amazing animal is also able to jump up to ten feet high if scared. That is like a three foot child leaping over a six story building!



Pocket Gopher
Geomys spp.

Pocket gophers at White Sands are found in areas that are sparsely vegetated. They will spend most of their life in burrows, occasionally coming out to find a mate or forage. Their diet consists of plants such as four wing saltbush and Indian rice

grass. They fall prey to predators who know to look for gopher mounds, such as badgers and coyotes. At White Sands their coat can range from reddish to a sandy brown to yellowish-white.



Porcupine
Erethizon dorsatum

The porcupine is North America's second largest rodent. The porcupine lives in a variety of habitats. At White Sands, the porcupine lives in the highly vegetated areas at the edges of the dunefield. Porcupines are the only mammal in North America with

antibiotics in its skin. This helps the porcupine heal after it falls out of a tree, trying to reach for tender buds, and is poked with its own quills. They eat buds, roots, and bark. The porcupine is not as commonly seen today as it was a few decades ago.



Desert Cottontail
Sylvagus audobonii

The desert cottontail can be found around the visitor center and in the desert scrub habitats of the monument. In the summer they are usually found shading themselves from the heat and are active at night. In the cooler months they can be

seen at all hours of the day. The desert cottontail can run half as fast as the jackrabbit (20 mph) but has the comfort of a burrow to hide from predators. They are strictly vegetarians and eat grasses and leaves.



Black-Tailed Jackrabbit
Lepus californicus

The black-tailed jackrabbit is dubbed so because it has a large black line running from the top of its tail to its rump. It can be found where the dunes meet the desert. Sometimes they become a meal for the coyote. It can outrun a coyote at speeds of up

to 40 mph. It cannot endure a long flight and since it does not burrow, it has to depend on its speed to outdistance predators. Jackrabbit kits are born fully formed and are able to forage for themselves in about two weeks.



Kit Fox
Vulpes macrotis

The Chihuahua-size kit fox is the largest animal that lives in the dunefield. It weighs about five pounds. Unlike other canines, it is not a pack animal. This nocturnal animal eats mostly small animals such as kangaroo rats, Apache pocket

mice, insects, lizards, and snakes. It has large ears for listening, also used to dissipate heat. Kit foxes at White Sands have fur in between their toes to help give them traction in the sand. Great horned owls prey on the kit fox.



Badger
Taxidea taxus

The badger is in the same family as the weasel. These nocturnal animals are found along the outer edges of the dunefield where there is more vegetation. Badgers have a strong sense of smell that helps them locate their prey. They use their huge claws,

which can be up to two inches long, to dig burrows and unearth their prey. Rodents, reptiles, and insects are mainstays of the badger diet. Badgers are quite aggressive, but some have been observed playing and even hunting with coyotes!



Coyote
Canis latrans

This furry fella is as iconic of the southwest as his larger cousin the wolf is of the northwest. Coyotes can be found on the fringes of the dunefield among the Chihuahuan Desert scrub. They are active in the early evenings and mornings, but

are occasionally spotted in the day. Coyotes eat anything from rodents to road kill. This canine is very successful and highly adaptable to different environs like the other mammals at White Sands.



Bobcat
Lynx rufus

The bobcat can be found on the outskirts of the dunefield at White Sands. The bobcat's nocturnal lifestyle allows it to depend on stealth, and not pursuit, to catch its prey. Its meal of choice is small rodents. It will also eat ground

nesting birds and even insects. It looks larger and furrer than domestic cats but is no match for the mountain lion. Bobcats are solitary by nature and have a range that extends several miles.