



## 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.



**Porcupine**  
*Erethizon dorsatum*

The porcupine is North America's second largest rodent. It lives in a variety of habitats, varied climates, and elevations. At White Sands it can be found at the edge of the dunefield in heavily vegetated areas. A porcupine has about 30,000 quills that are barbed on the end. Their quills are used offensively and defensively. 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 and is poked with its own quills. They fall out of trees frequently because porcupines tend to reach for the tender buds at the end of a branch. They eat buds, roots, and bark.



**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. Badger burrows are easily identifiable by their low ceiling and wide opening, much like the badgers physique. 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.



**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.



**Kangaroo Rat**  
*Dipodomys spectabilis*

The kangaroo rat has a few tricks to help escape predators. It can use its long hind legs to distance itself from potential predators. While running at top speeds the kangaroo rat will use its long tail as a rudder to change direction suddenly. This amazing rodent can be found throughout

the park in vegetated areas. 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!



**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.



**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.



**Apache Pocket Mouse**  
*Perognathus flavescens Apachii*

The Apache pocket mouse is endemic to the 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 to

blend into 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.



**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, jackrabbits, insects, lizards, and snakes. The blood

of the prey that it eats provides the kit fox with all the water it needs. It has large ears for listening for prey and heat dissipation. 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.



**Desert Cottontail**  
*Sylvalagus audobonii*

The desert cottontail can be found around the visitor center and in the desert scrub habitats of the monument. They are usually found sharing habitat with the larger and faster black-tail jackrabbit. 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 (20mph) but has the comfort of a burrow to hide from predators. They are strictly vegetarians and eat grasses and leaves.



**Pocket Gopher**  
*Geomys spp.*

Pocket gophers at White Sands are found in three different areas: under parabolic dunes, in interdunal areas, and along the edges of the dunefield. All three of these areas are sparsely vegetated. Three different species of pocket gophers live here, and they all share the same characteristics. They will spend most of their life under ground 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. Like gophers anywhere, they are easy prey for reptiles that enter tunnels and burrows. They also fall prey to predators who know to look for gopher mounds, such as badgers and coyotes. Gopher mounds are identifiable by the presence of fresh sand and soil. At White Sands their coat can range from reddish to a sandy brown to yellowish-white.