



# Deserts

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Sandy deserts





Stony deserts



Australian desert vegetation







Desert vegetation. Mt Olga  
National Park, Central  
Australia



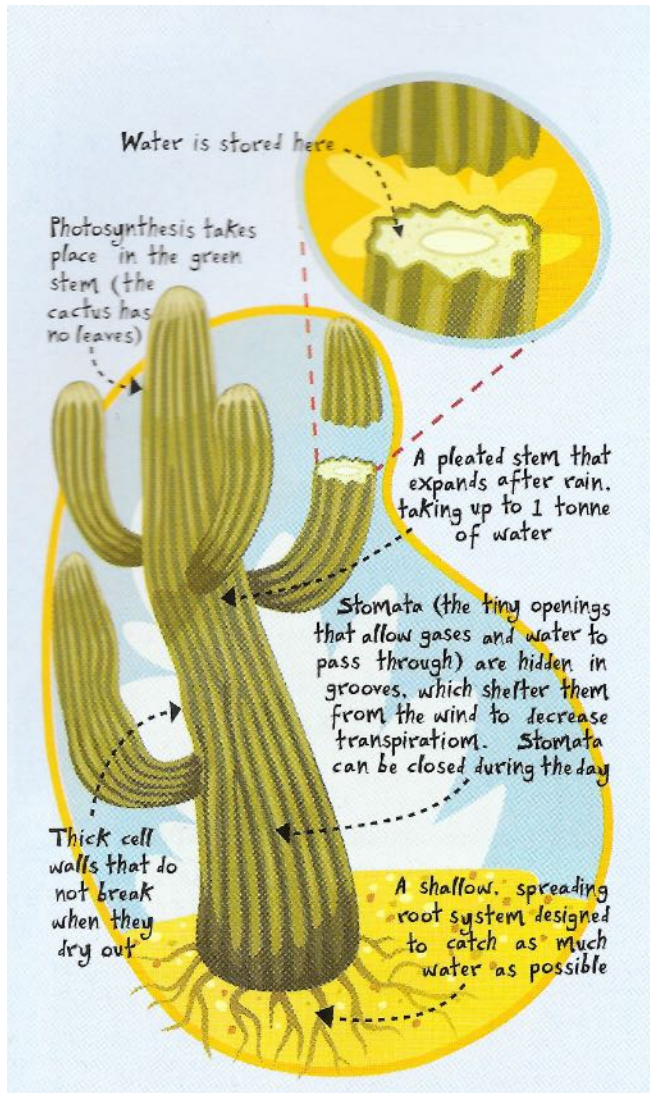




Desert vegetation, Arizona, USA







Desert plants have developed amazing ways to survive the very dry conditions of deserts.

Drought-resistant plants are known as xerophytes. Many xerophytes are succulents. This means that they can store water in their tissue. Cacti, for example, absorb large amounts of water following rainfall. Their fleshy stems swell up, then slowly shrink as water is lost through transpiration (the loss of water through leaves). Many succulents also reduce water loss by only transpiring at night.

Most desert plants have small thorny or waxy leaves. This reduces the loss of water through transpiration. Desert plants also have very long root systems. This allows them to take in any water available. Some plants store water in bulbs attached to their roots.

Ephemeral desert plants burst into life following rain. Their entire life-cycle is short and seeds lay dormant in the soil until it rains again.



Thorny Devil lizard, outback Australia





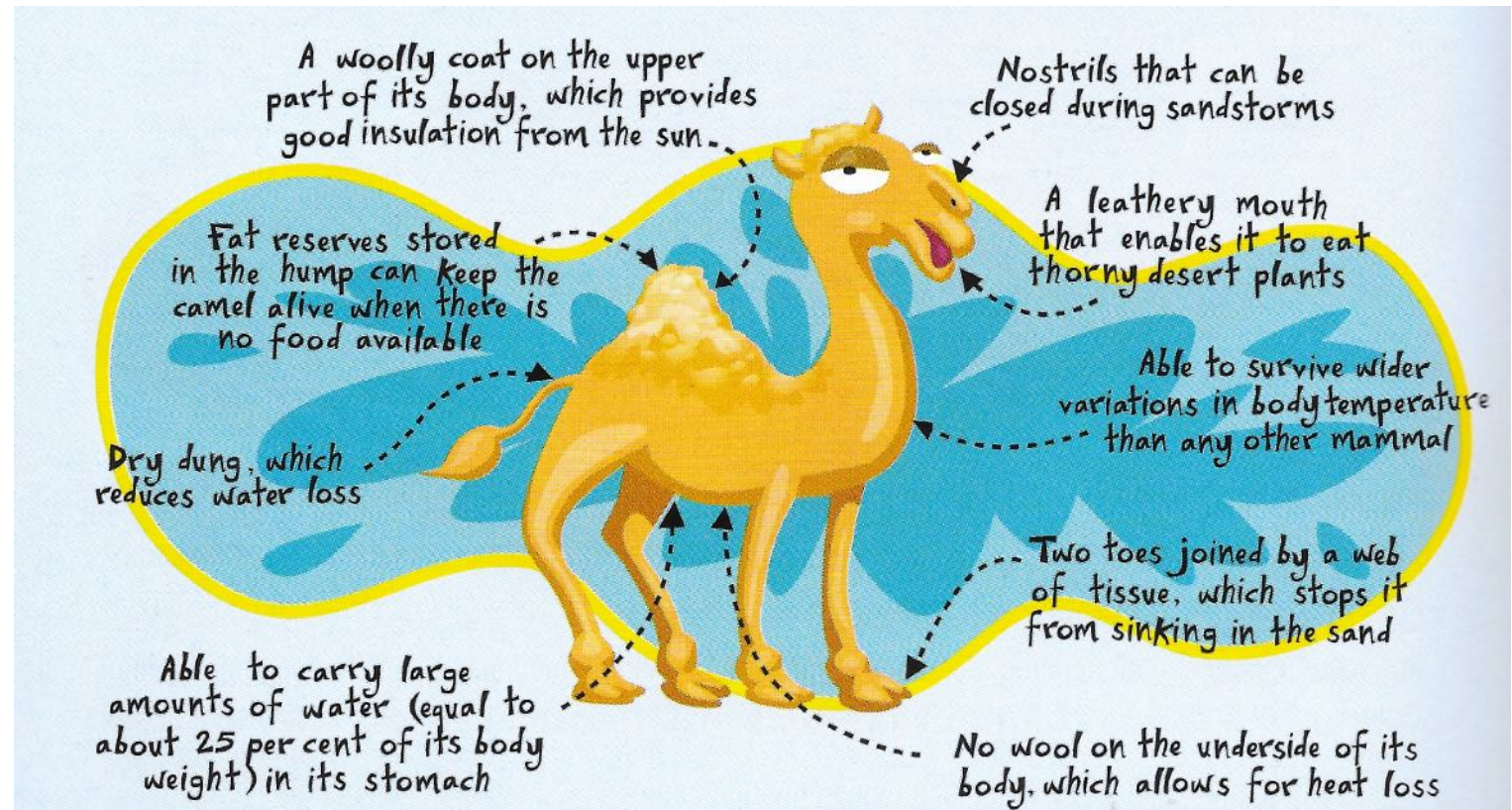
Camels



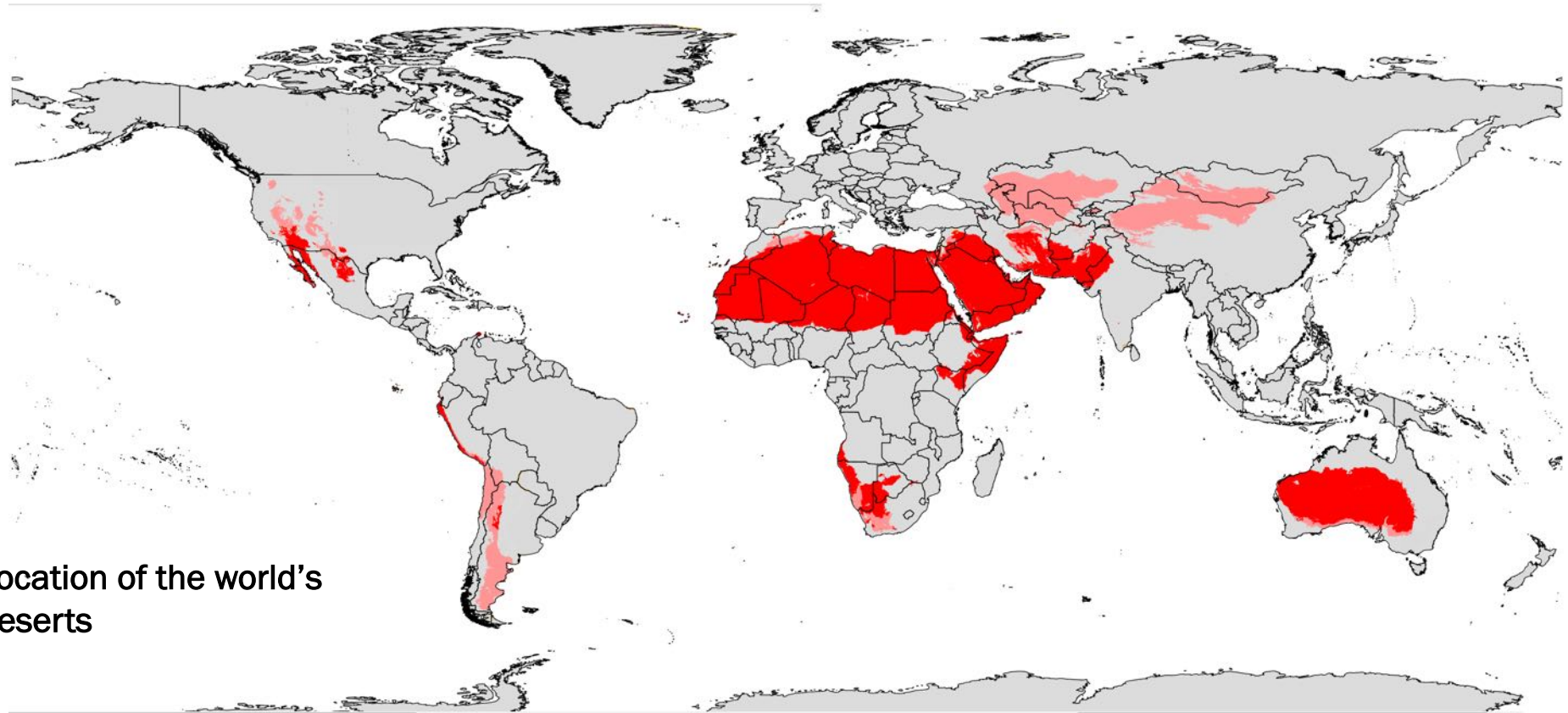


Animals have adapted to the dry conditions of the desert environment in many amazing ways.

Unlike the camel, most of the animals of the desert are small and nocturnal, which keeps heat gain and loss to a minimum. Most avoid the heat by hiding in burrows or under rocks by day and being active during the night or early morning. Insects and reptiles have thick outer coverings so that they lose as little water as possible through evaporation. Some desert animals become dormant (or inactive) during periods of extreme heat or drought.





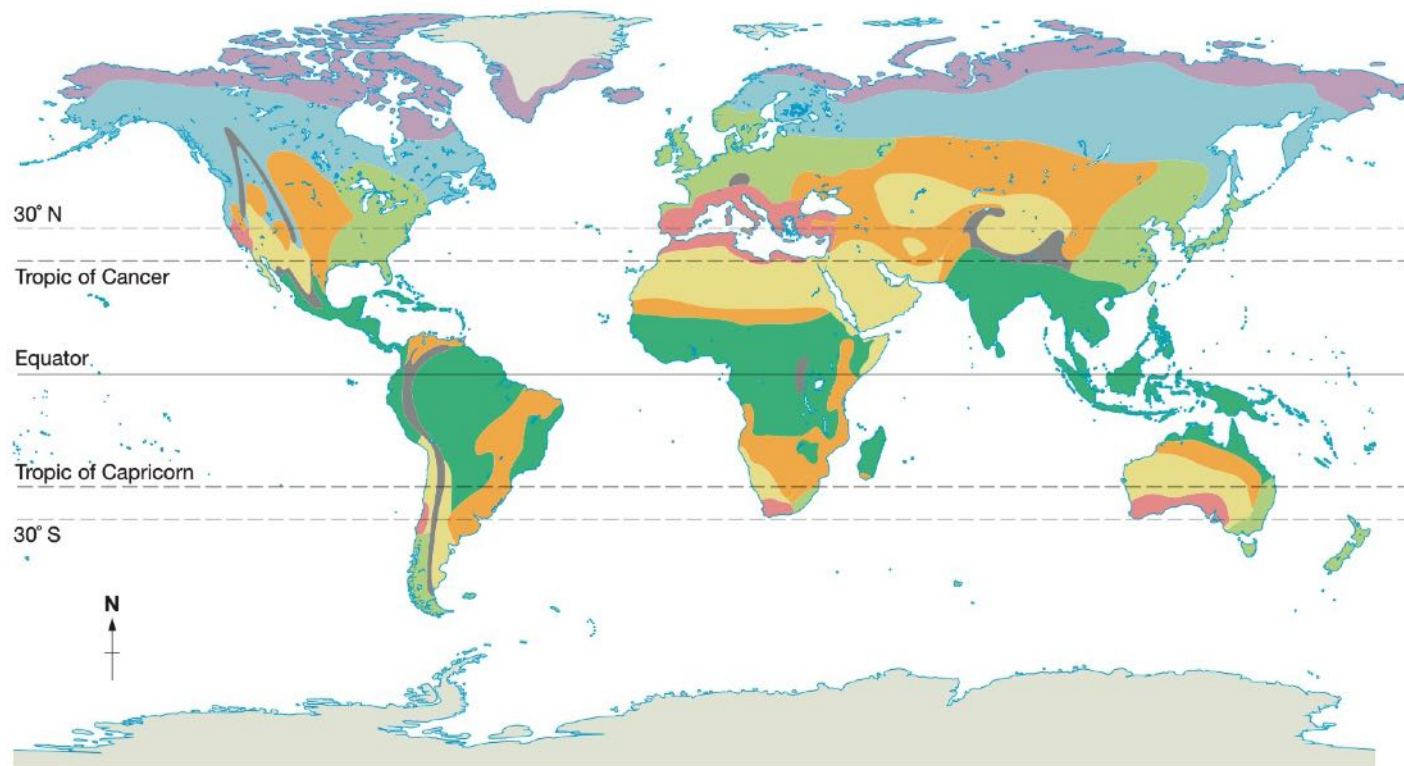


Location of the world's  
deserts










Hot deserts (dark red)

Cold deserts (light red)





Key

 Tropical forest	 Deciduous and evergreen forest	 Chaparral
 Temperate grassland	 Coniferous forest	 High mountains
 Desert	 Tundra	 Polar ice



Deserts are spreading! Why?

