

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Desert Survivor

By Guy Belleranti



**P**icture a scene on a hot summer day in California's Mojave Desert. There are cacti, shrubs, and a plump lizard lying flat on a large rock basking, or

in the southwestern deserts of



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from its hiding place. When the predator, the rattlesnake, is gone, the lizard deflates its lungs and leaves the crevice. This is one way this lizard protects itself and avoids becoming a meal for a hungry predator.

This lizard is the chuckwalla. Chuckwallas are members of the iguana family. They are the second-largest lizard in the United States. Only the venomous Gila monster is larger.

Chuckwallas are shy, non-aggressive animals. They live

loose folds of skin around their bodies and necks. Adults average 12 to 18 inches (30–46 cm) in length, with the tail being approximately half the length of the animal.

And speaking of the tail—it helps some chuckwallas to survive. How? Well, if a predator manages to grab the chuckwalla's tail, the lizard leaves its wiggling tail behind and escapes. Later, the chuckwalla can regrow a new tail!

Males are usually darker than

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females, with black or brown on their heads and bodies and lighter-colored tails. Some males may also have orange or red splotches on their backs. Females and the young tend to be more gray and yellow. The color patterns can vary with where they live and provide camouflage in their desert habitats.

Chuckwallas are primarily herbivores. They eat leaves,



winter arrives? Like other reptiles, they are ectothermic (cold-blooded). This means their



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be a problem, but chuckwallas have a way to deal with this. They have special glands in their nasal passages that remove excess salt. Then, they sneeze the salt out! Achoo!

Chuckwallas are one of the few reptiles out and about when the temperature is 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38°C) or more. By moving into or out of the sun, they maintain safe body temperatures.

How do chuckwallas maintain a safe body temperature when

activity to conserve energy. Chuckwallas seek places to shelter from the cold. Some find abandoned underground burrows. Others find shelter in rock crevices.

Chuckwallas can hide from predators such as rattlesnakes, coyotes, and hawks in rock crevices, but they cannot hide from urban expansion into their habitats. Another threat to the chuckwalla is people who take them out of their environment and sell them in the pet trade.

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- All of the following are harmful to chuckwallas **except...**
  - rattlesnakes
  - urban expansion
  - the pet trade
  - temperatures over 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- Reread the following sentences from the article.

*Chuckwallas are primarily herbivores. They eat leaves, stems, flowers, and fruit from the desert vegetation.*

What does the word herbivores mean?

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- to entertain the reader with a story about a lizard
- to explain why the chuckwalla is an herbivore
- to inform the reader about chuckwallas
- to persuade the reader to purchase a chuckwalla

- Fill in the table.

Physical Trait	Purpose
extra skin	allows the chuckwalla to make itself larger when in danger in a rock crevice
	can drop this to escape when in danger
color patterns	
	let chuckwallas sneeze out the extra salt they eat

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# Desert Survivor



Fill in the missing letters to make a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. \_ r u \_ a \_ i \_ \_ \_

**clue:** hibernate

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_ o j \_ \_ e

**clue:** desert in California

\_\_\_\_\_



**Preview**  
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5. \_ \_ r \_ l \_ o \_ \_ \_

**clue:** only eats plants

\_\_\_\_\_

6. \_ e g \_ \_ a \_ i \_ n

**clue:** leaves, stems, flowers

\_\_\_\_\_

7. \_ \_ t \_ t h \_ \_ m \_ \_ \_

**clue:** cold-blooded

\_\_\_\_\_

8. \_ \_ e \_ a \_ o r

**clue:** hunting animal

\_\_\_\_\_

9. \_ h \_ c \_ \_ a \_ l \_ \_

**clue:** lizards with loose skin

\_\_\_\_\_

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# Desert Survivor

In the article, "Desert Survivor," you read about the ways chuckwallas can protect themselves. Write about the different ways chuckwallas can protect themselves from predators. Use details from the text to support your response.

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A horizontal banner with a blue background on the left and a white background on the right. On the left, a cartoon superhero character with brown hair, a blue suit, and a red cape is flying. The cape has a blue shield with the letters 'MJS' on it. On the right, the word 'Preview' is written in large, bold, red letters. Below it, in smaller black text, it says 'Please log in to download the printable version of this worksheet.'

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## ANSWER KEY



# Desert Survivor

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1. All of the following are harmful to chuckwallas **except...**

- a. rattlesnakes
- b. urban expansion
- c. the pet trade
- d. temperatures over 100 degrees Fahrenheit**

2. Reread the following sentences from the article.



<b>tail</b>	can drop this to escape when in danger
color patterns	<b>help chuckwallas blend into their environment using camouflage</b>
<b>special glands</b>	let chuckwallas sneeze out the extra salt they eat

## ANSWER KEY

# Desert Survivor



Fill in the missing letters to make a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. b r u m a t i o n

brumation

*clue: hibernate*



9. c h u c k w a l l a

chuckwalla

*clue: lizards with loose skin*