

THE NIGHT FLOWER

LARA
HAWTHORNE



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For Sonja, William and Jack

With special thanks to Debbie Colodner, Robin Kropp and Catherine Bartlett
at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.



B P P

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SAGUARO (SA-WAH-RO)

Carnegiea gigantea


The saguaro cactus is found in the Sonoran desert, which stretches approximately 260,000 square kilometres from the southwestern states in the United States to northwestern Mexico. The saguaro's flowers are special because they bloom for a single night once a year. Their strong scent and brilliant white petals attract rare pollinators during this short period, including bats, moths and doves.



The desert is greeted by the climbing sun.
It's vibrant and buzzy now spring has begun.
Can you spot the saguaros, so spiky and tall?
A haven for wildlife, the large and the small.

The tops of saguaros, at great lofty heights,
are a safe place for birds to take rest from their flights.
Woodpeckers tap, making homes with their beaks;
little round circles where they can retreat.





The desert blooms pink, orange, yellow and red,
while bees, birds and butterflies dance overhead.
Bright coloured petals call out to small beasts,
enticing them nearer for nectar-filled feasts.



Hiding in shade beneath sweet-smelling trees,
wandering deer are enjoying the leaves.
Young squirrels leap from thin branches that sway,
they hop and they hide, carefree as they play.




As temperatures rise the sun bakes the hard ground.
Sleepy eyes close and there's barely a sound.
Spotty scaled lizards look out at the view,
waiting for nightfall when noise will ensue.



At the foot of saguaros movements are slow,
animals wait for the night flower show.
A tortoise plods by in the heat of the day,
while a rattlesnake rasps as it snoozes away.

The desert wakes up as the temperature cools.
Animals search for the precious first bloom.
They head for a cactus, the tallest in sight,
waiting and watching as day turns to night.






As the darkness sets in, pale moths stir and unite,
searching for flowers in the cool desert night.
A fierce furry hunter with sharp pointed teeth,
howls at the moon on its little pink feet.


And high on the cactus, beneath the bright moon,
a tiny green bud is beginning to bloom ...

... its white velvet petals unfurl and reach high,
and a thick fruity fragrance fills the night sky.




An illustration of a night garden scene. The background is a dark, starry night sky with a large, bright, pale yellow moon in the upper center. In the foreground, several large, white, daisy-like flowers with yellow centers and green leaves are scattered across the scene. Three brown bats are depicted: one on the left with its wings spread, one in the center with its wings spread, and one on the right with its wings spread. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

More flowers wake up in a chorus of scent,
and new creatures appear for this special event.
The perfume entices some furry winged guests –
brown bats with black wings who stop by for a rest.



Near the saguaro in the shining moonlight,
the desert is festive and thriving tonight.
Bobcats chase pack rats and ringtails climb high,
watching white blooms by a starry bright sky.



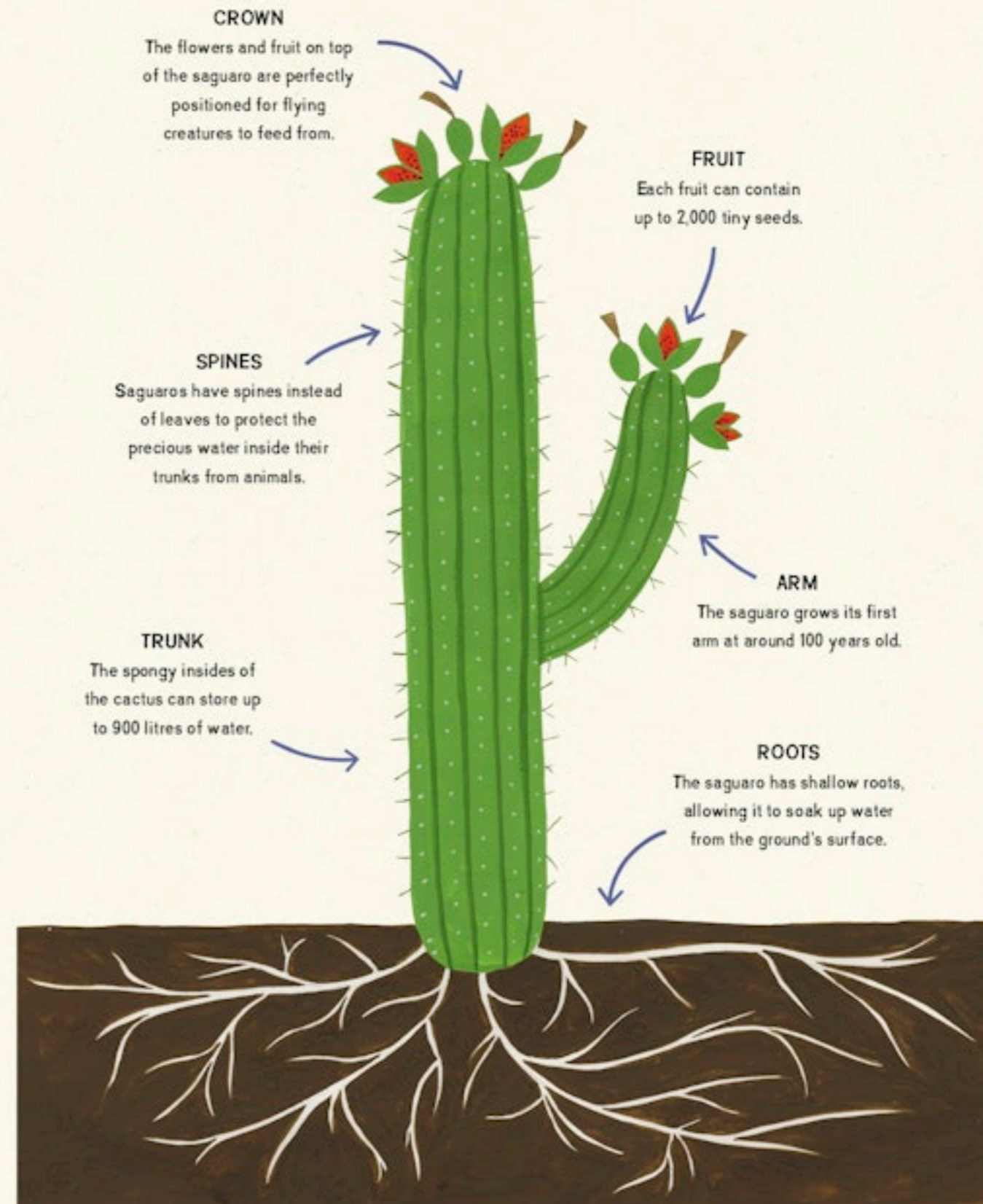
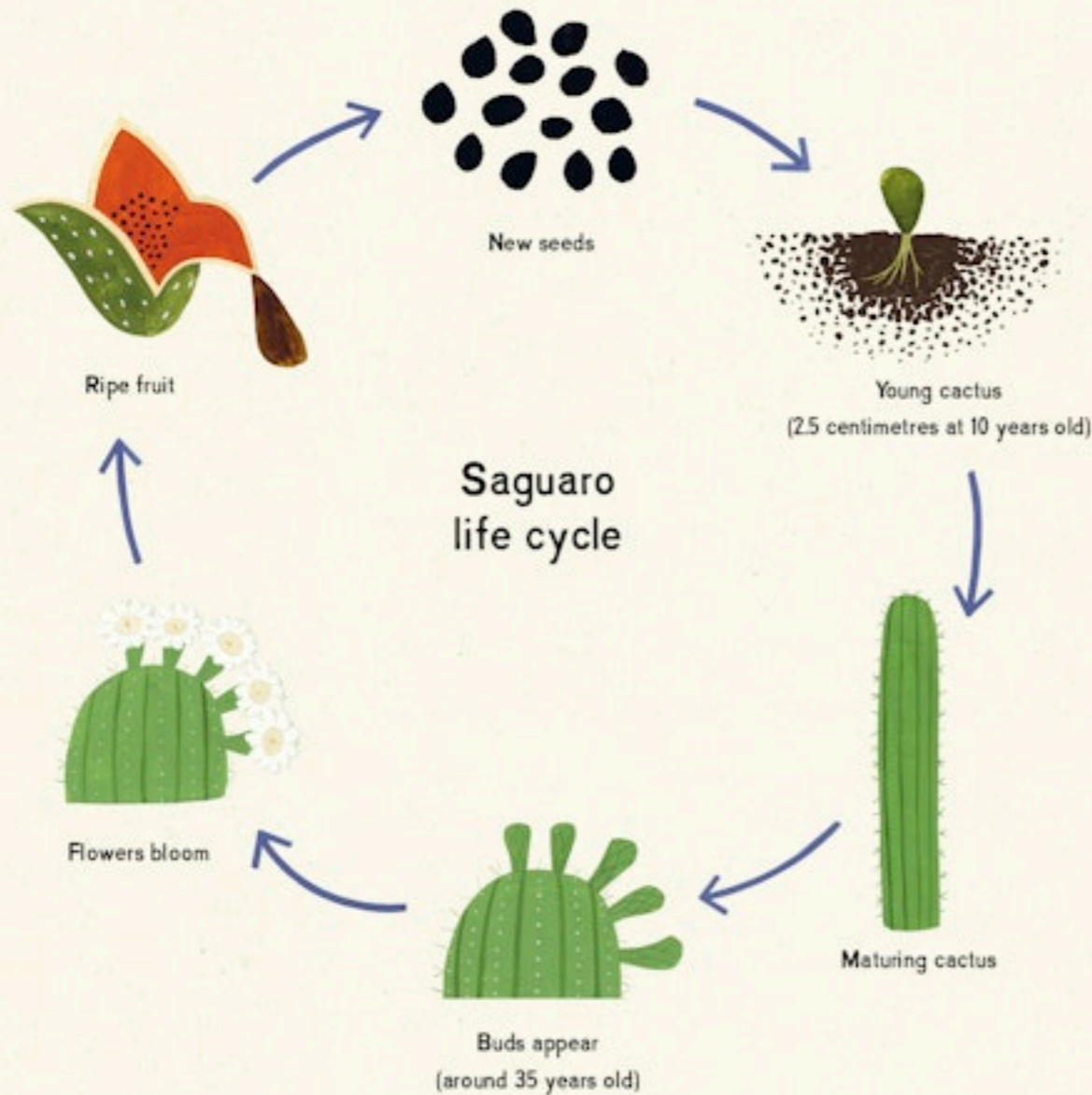
At the dawn of the day with the new rising sun,
the brown bats hurry home to take care of their young.
For the birds and the bees there are still a few hours,
to visit the cactus and sip from its flowers.

Soon calm will resume and the desert will rest,
but the busy saguaro is not finished yet.
Its flowers will close and a red fruit will grow . . .

. . . and soon there will be a brand new saguaro.

The Saguaro

Although saguaros can reach mighty heights of up to 15 metres, they grow very slowly. In fact, it may take up to 200 years before they fully mature. Saguaros need very particular conditions, so it can be a struggle for them to grow at all. Only one in many millions of seeds will manage to grow to the same size as their parent.



Did you spot . . . ?

Go back through the book and see if you can spot the saguaro's desert friends.



RAINBOW GRASSHOPPER

(Dactylotum bicolor)

This beautiful insect is often called a 'painted grasshopper' because of its bright colours. In fact, these colours are important as they help to warn potential predators away.



GRASSHOPPER MOUSE

(Onychomys torridus)

This fierce rodent is much like a miniature wolf – before eating its prey it stands on its feet and howls at the moon! Grasshopper mice eat all sorts of things including poisonous scorpions. They are known to stalk their prey like a cat.



RINGTAIL

(Bassariscus astutus)

A member of the raccoon family, these nocturnal mammals use their huge eyes and ears to track down prey. Their Latin name means 'clever little fox'.



LESSER LONG-NOSED BAT

(Leptonycteris yerbabuenae)

The night flower's nectar provides vital fuel for these bats as they cross the Sonoran desert on their annual migration. Several thousand will descend on the desert, dispersing the flower's pollen and seeds as they feed.



GAMBEL'S QUAIL

(Callipepla gambelii)

These small birds need to consume water every day. One way is through eating food such as cactus fruits. It is rare to see them fly – they prefer to run.



BOBCAT

(Lynx rufus)

Despite being the most common cat in the Sonoran desert, the bobcat is rarely seen. They rest in caves or under low-lying trees and hunt rabbits, lizards and even small deer for food.



WHITE-LINED SPHINX MOTH

(Hyles lineata)

The Sonoran desert is thriving with moth species. Most only appear at night and feed on the variety of sweet-smelling flowers. One of these is the white-lined sphinx moth. It is often compared to a hummingbird, because of its hovering style whilst it feeds.



GILA MONSTER

(Heloderma suspectum)

These slow-moving reptiles are one of only two venomous lizards known in the world. They spend much of their time in underground burrows and shelters, and can eat as much as half their body weight in one feeding!



SONORAN DESERT TORTOISE

(Gopherus morafkai)

These slow and sturdy creatures are well-suited to the dry, hot desert. They keep cool by hiding under plants or in underground burrows and can also survive for a long time without water or food.



GILA WOODPECKER

(Melanerpes uropygialis)

Distinctly coloured with zebra-like markings, these birds are permanent Sonoran dwellers. With their long pointy beaks they often peck holes in saguaros where they can raise their chicks safely.

Glossary



BUD

A growth on a plant that will develop into a leaf, flower or shoot.



POLLEN

Tiny, soft yellow grains from a flower that can help other plants to grow.

DISPERSE

To spread seeds from a plant.



HABITAT

The natural home of an animal or plant.

POLLINATE

To take pollen from one flower to another.



POLLINATOR

An animal that takes pollen from one flower and passes it to another.

MATURE

To develop fully into adulthood.

PREDATOR

An animal that eats other animals for food.

MIGRATION

A seasonal journey an animal makes, usually in search of food, shelter or a mate.

RIPE

When a fruit is ready to eat.



NECTAR

The sugary sweet liquid produced by plants to encourage pollination.

SCENT

A particular smell produced by a plant.

NOCTURNAL

To be active at night.

VENOMOUS

An animal that makes venom – a type of poison.

