

Saguaros are good neighbors

Fragrant flowers are the next generation's first step



From flowers to fruits to seeds to tiny sprouts to towering pillars—round and round the saguaro life cycle goes. Saguaros bear their first flowers when they are between 7–10 ft / 2–3 m tall. The waxy, white blossoms, (Arizona's state flower), appear mid-May to mid-June, as many as 200 on one plant. Just a few flowers on a plant bloom each night and they bloom only once, remaining open for less than twenty-four hours. Pollinated by bats at night and birds and bugs during the day, saguaro flowers offer protein-rich pollen and sweet nectar.

Gila woodpecker
Melanerpes uropygialis



Sowing saguaros is bird business

The best sowers of saguaro seeds are fruit-eating birds such as doves, woodpeckers, and house finches. The tiny seeds pass through them and their droppings often fall in ideal spots for sprouting—beneath the birds' roosts in potential "nurse" trees which in turn protect young seedlings.

Harris's hawk
Parabuteo unicinctus



Bats, birds, javelinas, rodents, coyotes, and other creatures are lucky to have saguaros as members of their community. Their flower nectar, pollen, fruit, and sometimes even the cactus itself, are important food sources for many animals native to the Sonoran Desert.

Saguaros also offer shelter from the desert's intense climate and from potential predators. Gila woodpeckers and gilded flickers burrow cavity nests in saguaro stems—homes that are taken over by elf owls, American kestrels, and other birds once the original residents have moved on. Great horned owls and red-tailed hawks build brushy nests in the crooks of adjoining saguaro arms.

javelina
collared peccary
Dicotyles tajacu



western screech owl
Otus kennicottii

Insulated by the bulk of the cactus, cavity nests remain cooler in summer (as much as 20°F / -7°C) and warmer in winter than the surrounding environment. Even after a cactus has died, these nests retain their form in the decaying plant and are called "saguaro boots" because of their shape.