

# “A Day and Night in the Desert” OR “Seco’s Big Adventure”

by Barb Pepper, docent

## Characters:

Sonora, a Jackrabbit and the narrator of our tale

Seco, a Round-tailed Ground Squirrel and the hero of the story

El Capitán, a very old and distinguished Saguaro and Seco’s mentor

Plume, a Gambel’s quail and Seco’s best friend

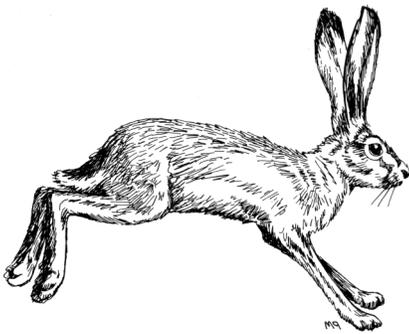
Rubio, an excitable Red-tailed Hawk

Shadow and Eve, a pair of brave Lesser Long-nosed Bats

Sneaker, a hungry Coyote

Night Eyes, a hungry Great Horned Owl

The Chorus, six musical Pocket Mice

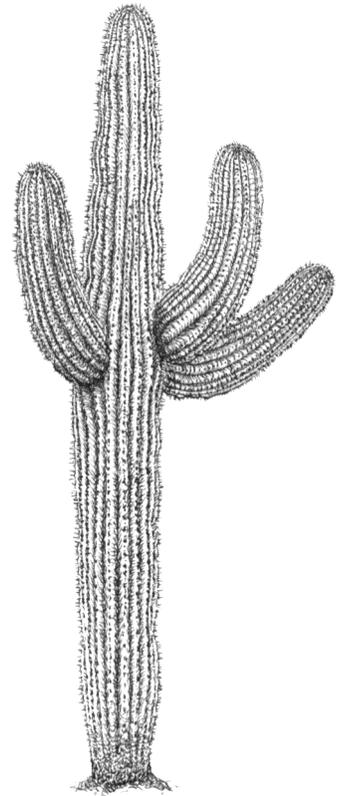


Hello, I am Sonora the jackrabbit and I am here to share a story about a day and a night in our beautiful desert that happened not too far from Tucson and not so very long ago. Do you have your listening ears on? Shall we begin?

All around, the desert is sleeping; it’s still very early in the morning. The stars have faded, but here comes the sun spreading its golden rays

across the desert floor. It’s going to be another bright and sunny spring day. This might be the hottest day of the year so far.

Standing watch over a small hillside, as he has been for so many years, is El Capitán, the Giant Saguaro. And nearby is a small hole in the ground. Out of this hole pops a head; it’s brown, and has tiny ears and bristly whiskers. The little black eyes are still sleepy. This is Seco, the round-tailed ground squirrel. He looks around carefully, and pulls himself out into the bright sunshine. Seco yawns and stretches. He’s been curled up in a ball inside his hole all night, and now he’s very hungry.



**[Seco]** - “Buenos días, Capitán.”

**[El Capitán.]** - “And a very good morning to you too, Seco. Did you sleep well?”

**[Seco]** - "Oh yes, very well, thank you. Did anything exciting happen during the night while I was sleeping?"

El Capitán begins to tell Seco all of the things that happened during the night: a large hairy tarantula crawled around on the ground near Seco's hole and peered down it. It eventually wandered off into the night, looking for another tarantula. Then a grizzly javelina rubbed up against a prickly pear cactus, breaking off some of its spines. The javelina had stiff hair and sharp tusks. He finally wandered off too, looking for some succulent underground roots to munch on. But that was just for starters. Sometime right before dawn, a family of pocket mice was making quite a racket while they were foraging for seeds:

**[Mouse Chorus – sung to the tune of "Three Blind Mice"] -**



*We're six pocket mice, six pocket mice,  
See us scurry around, all around the ground.  
We're out in the dark and we're hunting for seeds,  
The desert provides for all of our needs.  
When a predator comes, we hide in the weeds,*

*We're six pocket mice, six pocket mice,  
See us scurry around, all around the ground.  
We're out in the dark and we're hunting for seeds,  
The desert provides for all of our needs,  
So watch where you walk and don't step on us  
pleeeeeease . . .!  
We're six pocket mice, six pocket mice . . .*

Now El Capitán is a good friend of Seco's and he is a very old saguaro. He knows everything that has gone on in this part of the Sonoran Desert for at least 200 years. El Capitán is the desert's historian, too; he can tell you how many seasons ago it was when the big floodwaters came, or seasons when there was almost no rain at all. He can also tell you everything that takes place each night, since he never sleeps. Seco relies on El Capitán to provide him with saguaro seeds during the summer. El Capitán's ripe, sweet fruit are full of tiny black seeds that just hit the spot on a hot summer's day for creatures like pocket mice, and ground squirrels.

**[Seco]** - "Well, I guess I had better get busy, Capitán, I have a lot to do today. Wish me luck finding plenty of seeds and flowers to eat."

**[El C.]** - “Don’t wander too far, Seco. You know who still might be out there hunting; Sneaker, the coyote. I’ve heard that she has three young pups this year so she will be hunting extra hard, since she has to feed them too. You watch your step, my friend.”

**[Seco]** - “Thanks for the warning, Capitán. I’ll be careful.”

And with that, Seco takes off scurrying from bush to bush. Seco is a good runner, and travels all over his territory each day looking for seeds and flowers to take back to his burrow. He finds a few seeds left over from the past winter and returns to his burrow with them. He takes them down into his underground home, and stacks them neatly in his seed room.

So back up and out of his hole he goes. He knows he needs to find more seeds, and that means he will have to travel further from his burrow to find them. Seco remembers El Capitán’s warning about Sneaker the coyote. Maybe he should ask someone to go with him this time. He runs over to a nearby thicket of catclaw bushes. This is the home of Seco’s best friend, Plume, the Gambel’s Quail.



**[Seco]** - “Hey, Plume, are you up? Or are you still in dreamland?” **[No answer; Seco yells louder]** “Hey! Plume! Up and at ‘em!”

**[Plume]** - “I’m up, I’m up. Stop your shouting. What time is it anyway?”

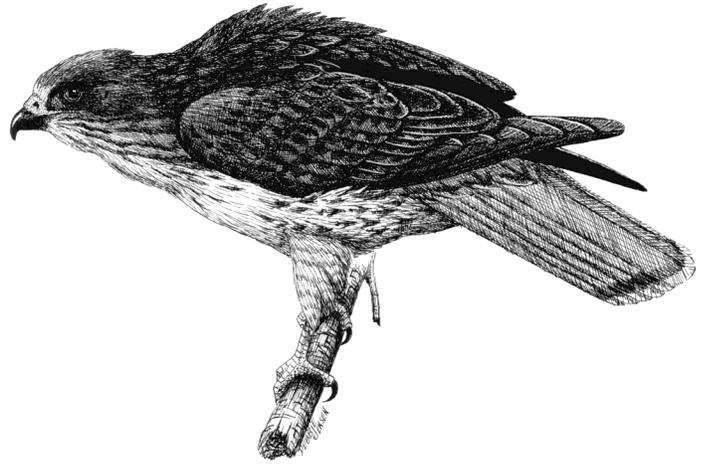
**[Seco]** - “Time to be up and enjoying this beautiful morning. Plume. I need you to go with me on a seed hunt. I’m a little scared that Sneaker the coyote may still be hunting. She has three new pups this year, you know.”

**[Plume]** - “OH, GOOD GRIEF! Now we’ll have to put up with four coyotes in this territory. Everyone will have to be extra careful. Sneaker is a very skillful predator. I’ll go with you and help to keep a lookout. Give me a minute to preen my feathers and I’ll be right with you. “

Seco waits for Plume near the safety of his hole. Finally, he hears Plume give his unmistakable call – chi-ca-go-go

Plume's loud call carries all across the desert. He's very good at watching for predators, such as coyotes. Plume has a large family to protect; he often sits on a low branch and keeps watch while the other members of his quail family feed on the ground. He is just the guy to have along on a seed-gathering expedition. So off they go, Plume flying ahead from bush to tree to bush, keeping watch for anything that might be moving behind rocks, or hiding in a dense patch of prickly pear cactus.

The two friends travel quickly, because the day is beginning to get hot. Seco makes several trips back and forth to his burrow, and he's getting tired, and so is Plume. They are just about to take a break from their seed gathering when Plume looks up into the sky. There's a beautiful Red-tailed Hawk soaring overhead - it's Rubio. Seco and Plume often see Rubio out hunting for rabbits. He too is a predator, and can easily spot his prey from way up in the sky. Since Rubio



travels such great distances every day, he always has a lot of gossip to tell Plume and Seco. Plume calls up to Rubio and Rubio banks sharply and flies downward. He comes in for a perfect landing right on the top of El Capitán. Plume flies over to El Capitán and yells up to Rubio.

**[Plume]** - "Hi Rubio! What's new?"

**[Rubio]** - "Wait 'til you hear this! You won't believe it. I hardly did myself."

Rubio always likes to keep everyone in suspense. Plume asks Rubio what is so exciting?

**[Rubio]** - "I just came over the big mountains, Plume, and guess who I saw? Huh? Huh? Guess! Who do you think it was?"

**[Plume]** - "I really have no idea, Rubio, so you'll just have to tell me."

Plume was getting annoyed with Rubio. Why can't he just spit it out like a normal hawk, thinks Plume.

**[Rubio]** - “Shadow and Eve. Eve and Shadow. The two of them. Both of them. They’re almost home. I’m sure it was they; you can’t mistake those two. No other bats can fly like they do. No sir-eee, it was them all right.”

**[Plume]** - “WOW! That’s great news, Rubio. Wait ‘til I tell Seco; he’ll be so pleased. How long do you think it will be before they get here?”

**[Rubio]** - “Oh. I think they could easily be here before dawn tomorrow. “

**[El C.]** - “You never know about those two acrobats. Sometimes they can pick up speed if they find some friendly air currents along the way. I wouldn’t be surprised to see them well before dawn.”

**[Plume]** - “Oh boy! I have to tell Seco the wonderful news. I’ll see you later Rubio. Happy hunting. I’ll see you later too, Capitán.”

Rubio flies off to continue his hunting. Plume quickly scampers over to where Seco is stuffing seeds into his mouth to carry back home. Plume tells Seco the exciting news; their two favorite Lesser Long-nosed Bats are about to return home from their yearly migration.

**[Seco]** - “I knew it! I just knew this was going to be a great day when I woke up this morning. I can hardly wait to see them. Shadow and Eve have been down in Mexico, spending the winter. They migrate south every year when it gets too cold for them here in the desert. I hope they’re both healthy and had a good time on their migration to Mexico.”

**[Plume]** - “They’ll be glad that some of the flowers are opening here now. Shadow and Eve love the nectar from the desert flowers. And that also helps to pollinate the flowers, so that even more beautiful desert plants can grow. El Capitán always loves to have Shadow and Eve visit his big white flowers at night.”

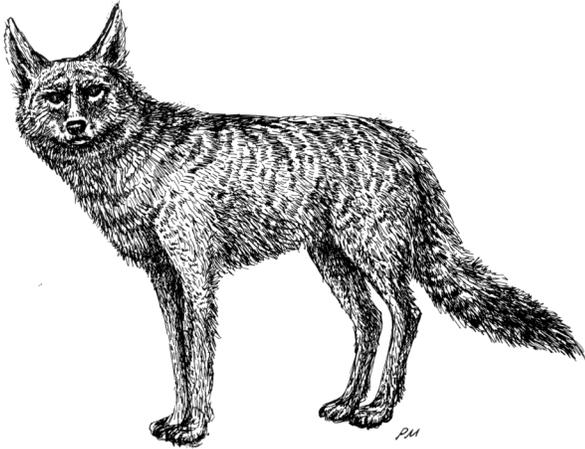
**[Seco]** - “You know what, Plume, I just had a great idea. I think I’ll stay up tonight to welcome them back. Want to stay up with me? Come on, it’ll be fun!”

**[Plume]** - “Well . . . I don’t know Seco. It’s not safe being out on the desert at night, you know. Neither one of us is really a nocturnal creature. I’m used to being snug in my catclaw thicket at night, and you’re used to being down in your burrow at night. We might run into a rattlesnake, or ah ah ah bobcat, or ah ah ah bear, or ah ah . . .”

**[Seco]** - “Oh, don’t be such a chicken, Plume. Look, if we stick together, and stay right here close to El Capitán, we’ll be fine. Besides, we’re *good* at being careful!”

**[Plume]** - “Well, all right, Seco. I guess you’ve talked me into it. I’ll meet you here close to El Capitán at dusk.”

**[Seco]** - “Great! I’ll be here, Plume.”



But right at that moment, Seco was so busy thinking about his bat friends returning home from migration that he forgot to be careful. He didn’t stop to think that Sneaker the Coyote might be out in broad daylight hunting.

But she is . . . and Seco is excited, and not paying attention to what is around him. Sneaker is hiding behind a clump of prickly pear. And she’s ready to pounce! Panicked, Plume calls from the thicket.

Seco knows what that call means. He makes a mad dash for his burrow. And just in the nick of time, too. Sneaker darts after him and...*almost*... catches him. Seco can feel her hot breath on his tail as he disappears down his hole. Seco realizes that he had a very close call. He’s shaking like a leaf. He sits there in his safe burrow for a few minutes before he has the nerve to pop his head out of his hole.

**[Plume]** - “The coast is clear, Seco. I watched Sneaker; she’s gone over to the wash to rest. It’s beginning to get too hot even for her to be hunting.”

**[Seco]** - “Thanks, Plume. You saved me. Coyotes are such good predators. And they’re good at hiding, too.”

Plume and Seco decide to call it a morning, and head on back to their burrow and bush for the hot part of the day. Both of them need a rest.

That sure was a close call for Seco. Now the two of them are resting during the heat of the day, safe in their homes. The desert breeze blows, and all is quiet as the afternoon passes into evening. Let’s see what happens to Seco and Plume as the sun begins to set behind the mountains . . .

Seco and Plume are determined to stay up and wait for their bat friends Shadow and Eve to return. The two Long-nosed bats are superb fliers; they can do so many acrobatic moves in the air. Seco has always wished that he could fly like Shadow and Eve. And even Plume, who can fly, would love to be able to go as high and as far as they do. All the way into Mexico is quite a distance for such small creatures to travel.

So now, with the stars twinkling brightly, Seco sticks his head out of his burrow and yawns. Plume is starting to awaken too; he stretches his wings and adjusts the feather plume on the top of his head. As the two friends meet near the base of El Capitán, the evening is getting much darker; the moon is now well up into the night sky.

**[Seco]** – “I’m not used to being up so late, Plume. I hope they get here pretty soon. I’m not a nocturnal guy; I’m usually safe in my burrow by this time of night. It’s scary out here in the dark.”

**[Plume]** - “I know just what you mean. Like I said, deep in my thicket is the only place where I feel safe.”

**[El C.]** - “Don’t worry friends, I’ll let you know the second I see them coming over the mountains. And the two of you had better stop looking at that sky and keep an eye out for danger; Sneaker is pretty hard to spot in this darkness. She likes to travel along that wash over there where she can’t be seen.”

So Seco and Plume take turns watching the sky for the bats to appear, and looking in the direction of the wash, just in case that pesky coyote Sneaker is nearby.

But . . . they should have been checking in the *other* direction, because someone has been sitting in the mesquite tree, watching them, ever so quietly. Just at that very moment, on silent wings, a huge brown and gray form takes off out of the tree. It’s Night Eyes, the Great-horned Owl. And he has his sights on a little ground squirrel who is not paying attention like he should. Down he comes, swiftly, without a sound, and grabs . . . Seco screams!

**[Plume]** - “Noooooo! Not my friend!”

**[Seco]** - “HEEEEEELP ME!

Seco is being carried up, higher and higher, up to the top of El Capitán, by Night Eyes, the owl. He lands on top of El Capitán with his half-dead prize. The owl’s powerful talons squeeze Seco harder and harder. Seco feels his breath being cut off. He thinks that any moment he will surely be dead.

**[El C.]** - “Wait just a minute, Night Eyes. That happens to be a friend of mine that you have in your talons.”

**[Night Eyes]** - “So, everybody is somebody’s friend, now aren’t they, old man. I happen to be very hungry. I haven’t had a good meal since night before last.”

**[Plume]** - “Please, Night Eyes, spare Seco. He’s only a little guy. He couldn’t possibly be worth bothering with.”

**[N.E.]** - “They all add up. Two or three of these guys a night and I’m full and happy.”

The owl has a powerful grip on Seco. Seco can barely breathe, and some of El Capitán’s sharp spines are sticking him right in the back. He knows that he will be dead in a few more minutes, and Night Eyes will begin to eat him. Seco’s last thoughts are of his friend Plume; he can hear him arguing with the owl. Plume and El Capitán are both demanding that Night Eyes let go of Seco. Seco is about to give up hope. A Great-horned Owl is a mighty predator; once he grabs someone in his powerful talons, he doesn’t let go. Seco knows he is a goner.



But ... just at that second . . . just at that very second . . .

**[El C.]** - “LOOK!!!! HERE THEY COME. Plume quick! Tell Shadow and Eve to hurry. IT’S AN EMERGENCY!!!”

Plume flies up to the top of his catclaw thicket, as high as his stubby wings will take him. He begins to bob his head up and down. He paces back and forth on the branch, and gives his danger call as loudly as he can.

As the bats approach, they notice Plume high in the thicket, bobbing and weaving. They know what that signal means; danger of some kind. Shadow and Eve fly close to Plume, and Plume tells them what is happening to Seco.

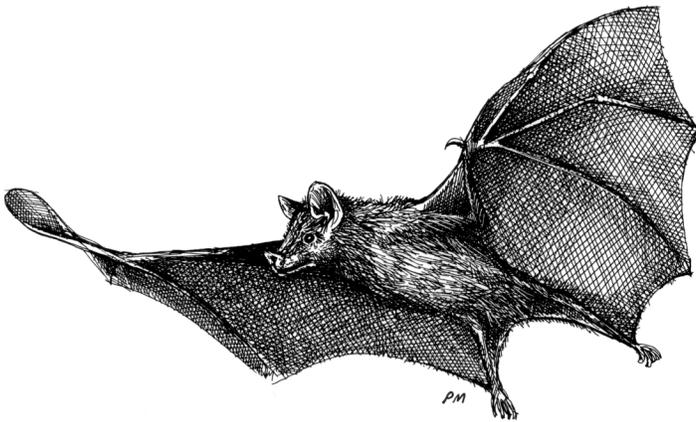
**[Shadow]** - “Let’s go Eve. Seco needs us!!”

**[Eve]** - “I’m right behind you, Shadow.”

Off they go at top speed, toward El Capitán, who is still arguing with the owl. El Capitán sees the two bats coming out of the corner of his eye.

Shadow and Eve spot Night Eyes at the top of El Capitán and make a hard dive right at the top of the owl's head. ZOOOOM! Night Eyes ducks. As he ducks, his grip on Seco loosens...just a little bit. Shadow and Eve circle and come back for another dive, this time turning sharply just before they get to the owl. Night Eyes leans back, almost falling off the saguaro. Night Eyes swivels his head as the two bats pass. Then Shadow and Eve reverse direction in a split second and clip Night Eyes' tail while he is looking in the other direction. The feathers fly.

[N.E.] -" HEY!! CUT IT OUT!! I'll get the two of you for this. You're spoiling my dinner."



The great owl's talons loosen...just a little bit more; Seco can breathe, and he begins to realize what is happening to him. He hopes that maybe... just maybe . . . the owl will be so distracted by Shadow and Eve that he'll be able to wriggle free. He begins to wriggle.

Shadow and Eve circle way out into the night sky and make another daring pass at Night Eyes. They have to be very careful; Night Eyes may drop Seco and grab at one of them. They are well aware that a bat is a favorite owl food, too.

In they come, so fast they can hardly be seen, bearing down right onto the owl's head. This time, they intend to knock him off the top of El Capitán. But Night Eyes' keen night vision sees them coming in the dark. He prepares to lift off the top of the saguaro and let them pass underneath him. Just as the bats are about to make contact, Night Eyes loosens his grip . . . just a little bit more.

Plume sees his moment and takes his chance. He dashes up onto one of El Capitán's arms and then jumps up and grabs Seco's tail; he gives a very hard jerk.

Seco squirts through the owl's talons and begins to fall. But Plume holds onto Seco's tail and breaks his fall. Seco hits the ground with a thud. Seco feels like his insides are jarred loose.

**[Plume]** - “Quick, Seco! Into your hole; this way.”

Plume helps Seco scramble to his hole. Seco dives in head first, and just in the nick of time too. Night Eyes swoops down, hoping to catch Seco again. But this time, Seco is sagely underground. Plume takes shelter in his thicket and scolds loudly.

**[N.E.- looking at Plume and then at hole]** - “All right! You win this time, you loud-mouthed pudgy peeper. And you, you little, brown, midget-mole, your friends may have helped you escape this time, but mark my words, I’ll be back. You just wait and see!”

Night Eyes is furious. He lifts off into the night, mumbling and grumbling to himself. Everyone watches him fly off, until he is safely out of sight. Plume walks over to Seco’s burrow.

**[Plume]** - “Are you okay down there Seco?”

No answer comes back to him. Shadow and Eve come in for a landing at the mesquite tree, and hang upside down, catching their breath. Plume sticks his head down the burrow as far as he can to see how Seco is. Seco slowly emerges. He can hardly walk, and his fur is ruffled here and there. But he’s alive. Seco looks over to where Shadow and Eve are hanging.

**[Seco]** - “You two saved my life. How can I ever thank you?”

**[Shadow]** - “Oh, it was nothing. All in a night’s work. But boy are we ever hungry. Traveling all the way home from Mexico and then having an air fight sure works up your appetite.”

**[Seco]** - “Don’t worry. I’ll get you something to eat now. I’ll check my store of flowers; there’s bound to be some nectar in some of them.”

**[Eve]** - “Thank you, Seco. That’s very kind of you. But why don’t you just rest. Shadow and I can fly over toward the wash; there are usually some early spring plants in bloom by this time. We’ll stock up on nectar there. You’ve been through a terrible ordeal. Then, when we come back, we want El Capitán to tell us all the things that have happened since we left last fall.”

**[EI C.]** - “Well, I can surely do that, Eve. [Bats fly off] But compared to tonight, it’s been quiet as a mouse around here!”

**[Mouse Chorus] -**

*Did someone mention mice? Did someone mention mice?  
We're happy Seco's alive, We're happy Seco's alive.  
We've been watching it all from our holes in the ground,  
We're happy the owl is no longer around,  
'Cause his wings are so silent they make not a sound,  
Did someone mention mice? Did someone mention mice?  
Did someone mention mice?*

So... Shadow and Eve have flown off to forage for nectar, and Seco and Plume sit down together. By this time, the dawn is just beginning to creep over the far mountains. Seco will be so glad to see the sunshine. He never wants to be a night owl again!

**[Seco]** - "What you did tonight took a lot of nerve, Plume. I just hope that someday I can repay you. If you hadn't been so brave, I would probably be dead by now."

**[Plume]** - "Oh, shucks! You don't need to repay me, Seco. Someday I might need to be rescued myself. Besides, what are friends for anyway?"

And so, the two friends watch the dawn arrive. Once Shadow and Eve have filled up with nectar, they'll find a favorite roost and sleep all day; upside down, of course. Night Eyes will hunt again the next night; but for now, he's sleeping in a tree over near the wash. Sneaker the coyote is finishing her hunting; she's caught a rabbit and is taking it back to her very hungry pups. Her pups will be so happy to see her. Seco and Plume creep back to their burrow and catclaw thicket; they can't stay awake any longer. They've learned their lesson; staying up at night is fun, but it's also dangerous. Seco vows that from now on, whenever it begins to get dark, he'll be sure to be in his underground burrow.

And so, boys and girls, we leave the Sonoran Desert; El Capitán is still keeping watch. The sun is rising higher and higher in the clear blue sky. And it's going to be another beautiful day.

**[Mouse Chorus] -**

*So. . . now we're at the end, now we're at the end,  
The sun is starting to rise, the birds will open their eyes,  
The desert's alive with the voices of day,  
The bees are humming and lizards will play,  
The flowers will open to welcome the day,  
But now we're at the end, now we're at the end, now we're at the end.*