

Rain means survival for desert dwellers

In times past, when rain returned to the desert each summer, the Tohono O'odham returned to their valley villages to plant the crops that would sustain them through the winter months. Though the Tohono O'odham way of life is very different today, rain still means survival for saguaros and the other plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert.



Monsoon season brings most of the desert's moisture

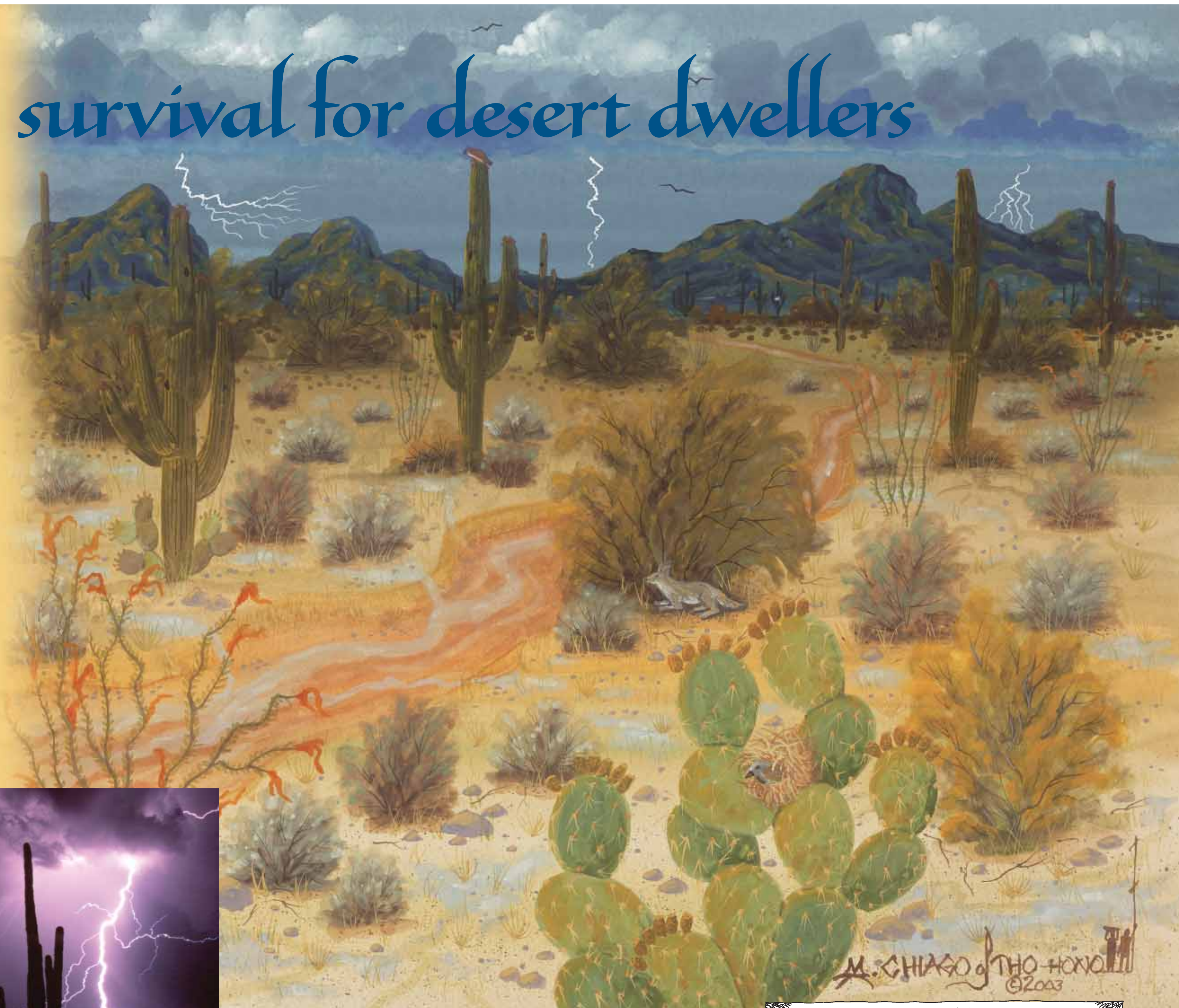
More than half of the rain that falls on the Tucson area each year falls between July and

September—the monsoon season. These summer showers and thunderstorms, which come to us by way of the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California, may drop 6–8 in / 15–20 cm of the annual 10–14 in / 25–35.5 cm of rain that are typical for our region.

The monsoon season provides young and mature saguaros an opportunity to replenish their stores of water. The saguaro's spongy interior allows the plant to soak up as much as 200 gallons (757 liters) in a single rain storm. Saguaro seeds sprout and grow into the tiny "canteens" that so many other species depend upon, and more seeds sprouting mean more seedlings with a chance at long-term survival.



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Rumors of saguaro die-off have been greatly exaggerated

Every so often, the desert enjoys back-to-back years of especially generous rainfall. These periods can allow sizable generations of saguaros to get a good start, resulting in forests of plants that are the same age. Naturally, plants of the same age are likely to experience old age, decline, and death together. However, die-offs of this sort have been known to cause frantic worry and exaggerated rumors of mass saguaro demise.

