

A large brown bear is walking through tall green grass in the foreground. In the background, there are steep, rocky mountains with patches of snow under a clear blue sky. The bear is facing right, and its fur is thick and brown. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor setting.

The West

 **beanstack** originals



The West

From grizzly bears to rattlesnakes, meet some of the coolest animals in the western United States.



The first stop on this amazing animal tour is the American West. This region contains many different habitats, or natural places where organisms live, including towering pine forests, desert vistas, and miles of coastline. It is also full of tons of animals!

Glorious Grizzlies

These bears might look as cute as their teddy bear counterparts, but they are much, much larger! A grizzly, which is a type of brown bear, can weigh up to 800 pounds (362.9 kg). And when standing on their hind feet, these bears tower over most adult humans at 8 feet high (2.4 m). But don't think their size makes them slow; grizzly bears can move at speeds of up to 35 miles per hour (56 km/hr)! Grizzlies use their powerful frames and bursts of speed to hunt small animals, fish, and enormous moose. However, even though grizzlies are at the top of the local food chain, or group of animals that eat one another, they also dine on vegetarian foods, such as nuts, berries, roots, leaves, and fruit—making them omnivores!

Although grizzly bears once lived over much of the western United States (as well as parts of Canada and Mexico), human hunting greatly damaged their populations. Today, the big beauties live mostly in parts of

FUN FACT

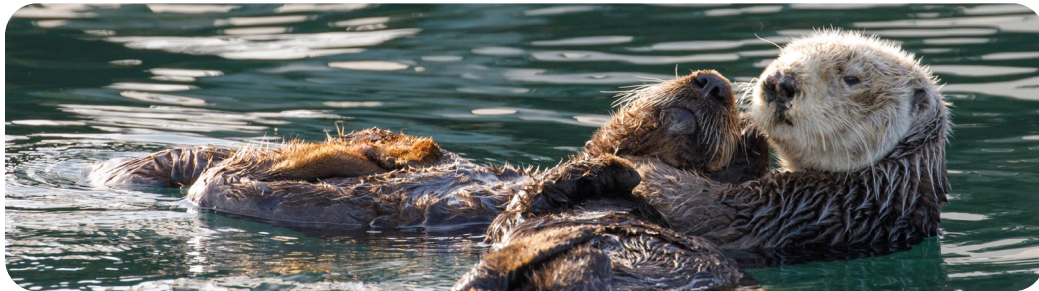
Grizzly bears sometimes rub their backs on trees to leave behind their scents—or to scratch hard-to-reach itches!



Animals Across America: The West



Alaska, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Canada. Fortunately, many people are dedicated to keeping these bears safe and healthy in the future.



Southern sea otters lounging in the water.

Otterly Adorable

Splash! A furry face peers up from a tangle of seaweed. It's a sea otter! Although they are mammals, sea otters spend most of their time in the ocean. Their thick fur keeps them warm and keeps out water. Their webbed paws help them swim swiftly. And otters' ears and nostrils can seal up tight to keep out water when they dive!

Southern sea otters can be found along California's coast, where they dine on crabs, sea snails, clams, mussels, sea urchins, and more. Their eating habits make them important parts of the local ecosystem, or interconnected community of animals and plants. Without sea otters, sea urchin populations would grow out of control, devouring too much of the local sea grasses. Luckily, sea otters keep everything in balance!

Along the coasts of Alaska and Washington, northern sea otters snack on the same foods, and also sometimes chow down on fish. All sea otters have special "pockets," or loose flaps of skin, that let them store snacks for later. They also save rocks in their pockets to crack open tasty shellfish. When not feasting, sea otters enjoy playing in the waves or taking naps. To avoid floating away in the ocean currents, they wrap themselves in kelp or seaweed—or even hold each other's paws.



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A rattlesnake coils up and gets ready to strike.

Super Rattlesnakes

Do you hear that rattling sound? No, it isn't a musical instrument; a rattlesnake may be nearby! These reptiles are named for the “rattles” that grow on the tips of their tails. However, these growths aren't really rattles—they are layers of connected scales. When a rattlesnake squeezes its muscles, the scales click together, making that famous rattling sound. The snakes use this sound to warn away potential predators.

DID YOU KNOW?

One type of rattlesnake, the Santa Catalina Island rattlesnake, doesn't have a rattle. This helps it climb trees and sneak up on its prey of choice: birds!

There are more than 24 species of rattlesnakes that live across parts of the U.S., Mexico, and Central and South America. However, they are most common in the desert regions of the southwestern U.S. There, these snakes dine on rodents, insects,

and other reptiles, and are very important for keeping rodent populations under control. Like some other snakes, rattlesnakes can sense their prey's body heat thanks to special organs located near their eyes. This makes them excellent hunters, even in the dark!



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A cougar prowls through a snowy field.

Clever Cougars

Also known as mountain lions or pumas, these big cats live across much of Central America, South America, Mexico, and the western U.S. And they certainly are big! Weighing up to 136 pounds (61.7 kg), a cougar's tail alone can grow up to 2.5 feet (0.8 m) long! Altogether, an adult male cougar can reach 8 feet (2.4 m) in length. Cougars also have many excellent senses, such as hearing and vision. Plus, they can use their powerful hind legs to jump 40 to 45 feet (12 to 14 m)—that's more than five times the length of their own bodies!

Baby cougars, called cubs, are much smaller, weighing less than 1 pound (0.5 kg) when they're born. Females usually give birth to two to four cubs in each litter. These cubs are born blind and with spots. After a few weeks, the cubs' eyes will open, and at about nine months, their spots will disappear. Meow!