



Female javelina and her baby, called a red.

Image courtesy of John Williams, National Park Service



Javelina

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Fort Selden Historic Site
1280 Ft. Selden Rd.
Radium Springs, NM 88054

Phone (575) 526-8911
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FORT SELDEN

HISTORIC SITE

JAVELINA



At about 250,000 square miles, the Chihuahuan Desert covers a large portion of North America from Northern Mexico through the Southwestern United States. It is home to around 1,000 different species of animals. Each of these animals have specific characteristics that help them survive in the desert environment.

In this brochure, learn about the javelina, one species found in the Chihuahuan Desert.

At Fort Selden, we often see the evidence of javelinas on site. They love to chew on our water lines during the night. If you keep your eyes peeled you might just see their tracks!

Physical Characteristics

Though they look similar, javelinas are not pigs nor are they boars. Javelinas are medium sized animals with small ears, short legs, a short tail, and short coarse hair that is salt and pepper colored.

Though they aren't a pig, they have a similar look including their pig-like nose. The collared peccary, the species of javelina found in the Chihuahuan Desert, has lighter colored hair around the base of its neck so it looks like its wearing a collar.

Diet

Javelinas eat a variety of desert plants such as agave, mesquite beans, and prickly pear. They will also eat lizards, dead birds, and rodents.

Habitat

Javelinas will make a home anywhere in the desert just so long as it is in the shade and out of the sun. This includes under trees and in small caves. They will also find shade in the shadow of houses which can sometimes cause damage to the home. They must stay in the shade when it is hot outside because unlike animals such as coyotes or mountain lions, javelinas don't have the ability to keep themselves from overheating.

Senses

Javelinas have a very unique scent gland at the top of their tail which helps mark their territory and identify

themselves to other javelinas. They rub their backside on rocks, tree stumps, and the other members of their herd to identify themselves.

They also have very poor eyesight. Though their very good hearing more than makes up for their bad eyesight, sometimes this affects how they escape from predators. It might look like a javelina is charging when really it is simply trying to escape or see you better. Still, it's best to watch javelina from a safe distance, just in case!

Predators

Predators of the javelina can include mountain lions, coyotes, and other big cats. Humans have also become a predator.

Interesting Facts

• Javelinas are very vocal animals. Their calls have three meanings. They make a barking sound when they are being aggressive, when they are being submissive, and when they are being alert.

• They live in groups, which helps them with survival as their herds can defend their territory.

• Baby javelinas are called "reds" because when they are young their hair is a red color.

• Javelinas will roll around in mud to try and cool off.

• Despite their short legs, javelinas can run up to 20 miles per hour!

• The word javelina is a Spanish word meaning 'javelin' or 'spear' as they have razor sharp tusks.

• Full grown javelinas weigh up to 90 lbs.

• The dominant male javelina in a herd typically does all the mating.

• When the female is about to give birth, she will retreat from the rest of the herd to prevent the other members from eating the newborn. She returns after one day but only trusts her young with the older sisters of the newborn.

• Pigs are an old-world species that were introduced to North America from Europe back in the days of heavy exploration. Peccaries are a new-world species and native to the western hemisphere.

• Fights for dominance often occur within the herd and scars on individuals will clue you in to just how sharp javelina tusks are!

• Javelinas tend to remain near permanent sources of water. Unlike coyotes and bobcats, peccaries are unable to evaporate moisture through panting to prevent overheating. During the fierce heat of midday, peccaries nest in the shade and forage where it's cooler.