

Lesson 5: Resource Sheet 1

Desert Fact Sheet



Location: Deserts are found in the centre of continents. In some cases, these extremely dry areas with little if any vegetation, stretch to the west coast of the continents. They are located in the mid-latitudes near the Tropic of Cancer or the Tropic of Capricorn. Large deserts are found in Australia, Africa, North America and South America. The Sarah Desert of northern Africa is the world's largest deserts. The Great Victoria Desert is Australia's largest desert and the world's fifth-largest. The Great Sandy Desert is Australia's second-largest desert. The majority of the world's deserts are found between 15° and 35° latitude, North and South of the equator.

Climate: Temperatures in the desert average 38°C during the day and -3.9°C of night. Rainfall is less than 250mm of per year. The key factor is, however, dryness. Some deserts have low average temperatures but have low rainfall which results in desert-like conditions.

Plants: Due to the hot, dry conditions found in deserts there is little if any vegetation. The soils of the desert are often shallow and very sandy with little decaying plant matter (humus). Some of the plants commonly found in a desert include cacti and succulents. Drought resistant plants are called epiphytes.

Animals: Deserts provide a habitat for a range of insects, reptiles, birds and mammals. These animals have adapted to dry conditions. Insects found in the desert include spiders and ants. Reptiles include a wide variety of lizard, snakes and scorpions. Vultures are birds that prey on decaying dead animals. Desert mammals include camels and small mice-like creatures.

Spread of deserts: Overgrazing is the major cause of desertification (the spread of deserts) worldwide. Other factors that climate change, deforestation, natural disasters and farming practices that expose soils to wind erosion.