

Harris Hawks

The Harris' hawk is a medium-sized, tropical or semitropical hawk, widely distributed from the US-Mexico border south to Chile and Argentina.

It is one of the most remarkable birds of prey, because it has a unique behavior pattern. These birds hunt in family groups, in much the same way as wolves hunt in packs. Each group consists of a pair, with a dominant female, and several helpers. When they sight their prey from the air, they land on the ground and take turns to scare the prey animal until it darts out from its hiding place and is captured by another member of the hunting pack. This seems to be an adaptation to flush out their prey from beneath the thorny habitats of mesquite, saguaro and semi-arid woodland without causing damage to the birds' plumage.

Turkey Vulture

The Turkey Vulture is one of North America's largest birds of prey. It reaches a length of 32 inches with a wingspan of 6 feet. Its overall color is brown-black with a featherless, red head, white bill and yellow feet among mature adults. Immature birds have a darker face. Although usually silent, the bird will occasionally emit a soft hiss or groan. In flight, the Turkey Vulture rocks from side to side, rarely flapping its wings that are held at a V-angle called a dihedral. Silver-gray flight feathers look lighter than the black lining feathers of the underwing. Its long tail extends beyond its legs and feet in flight.

Burrowing Owl

In the U.S., the burrowing owl is identified as a "candidate" species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In several states, they are considered a "species of special concern." They are "endangered" in Canada. Unlike most owls that only hunt at night, burrowing owls also hunt during the day. In October, they migrate to a warmer climate. Burrowing owls make a tremulous chuckling or chattering call. These small owls have brown and black spots and long legs. Being one of the smallest owl species, burrowing owls weigh only five or six ounces and are about 10 inches tall.

Coati

Coatis are active day and night. They spend their nights in trees, with several animals sharing the nest. While the male prefers to travel alone (and may be referred to as the *coati mundi*, or solitary coati), the females and their young tend to travel in bands of 4 to 50 individuals. Newborn coatis are altricial, or very immature at birth. The coati is a social animal, so it is very vocal with a lot of snorts, grunts, screams, whines and chatters. Most of the day is spent

foraging, but during the hottest part of the day, they tend to nap in trees. Coatis swim well and climb excellently. They use the tail for balancing on branches and for slowing down the descent of the tree.

READER NOTES:

CAST OF 6 READERS:

5 NARRATORS

(Some narrators also read special character lines as indicated below)

1 MISERY

- READER 1:** Once upon a time in the Sonoran desert, there lived an old woman whose name was Misery.
- READER 2:** She was called Misery because she had lived a long miserable life of disappointments, broken promises, and shattered dreams.
- READER 3:** Poor old Misery lived in a tiny rundown cabana with her old brown dog.
- READER 4:** Very few people came to call on the old lady, but when they did come a tap-tap-tapping at her door, Misery always called out,
- 5/MISERY:** "Go on home and let me be. Stay away from Misery!"
- READER 6:** This they did, and Misery felt more miserable than ever.
- READER 2:** The old woman owned one prize possession. It was a magnificent saguaro cactus planted many years ago by her great-great grandmother. The stately saguaro proudly stood behind Misery's cabana. Every year, in spring and early summer, Misery watched the saguaro burst into delicate white blossom and bare plump green fruit.
- READER 4:** But even the saguaro gave her more pain than pleasure, because when its fruit was ripe, all the

children from miles around came running to Misery's shack and tap-tap-tapped at her door.

READER 6: The children hoped Misery would give them some of the delicious fruit but, as usual, Misery called out,

5/MISERY: "Go on home and let me be. Stay away from Misery!"

READER 1: And when the children heard this, they just ran around the shack and helped themselves! They carried long poles made from the wooden ribs of saguaro skeletons and with these poles, they hooked, pulled, and knocked the fruit to the ground. Then they split open the fruit and happily ate the delicious red pulp. This, of course, made Misery more miserable still.

READER 3: Now, as the story is told, one day Misery heard a tap-tap-tapping at her door and, as usual, called out,

5/MISERY: "Go on home and let me be. Stay away from Misery!"

READER 2: But the tapping continued.

READER 4: Finally Misery cracked the door open and there she saw an old man with a long white beard kneeling on her doorstep, begging for food.

READER 6: Well, Misery had lived a long miserable life, but she felt sorry for the old man who looked even more miserable than she. And so she shared her prickly pear jelly, crusts of saguaro seed bread, and bits of cheese with him.

READER 1: When the old man had eaten his fill, he said,

3/OLD MAN: "Because you have been so kind to me, I have the power to grant you one wish. What will it be?"

READER 2: Misery had to think about that. She had lived a long miserable life and was beyond a desire for earthly possessions.

READER 4: Finally, however, an idea came into her head and she wished,

5/MISERY: "When others steal from Misery
And take saguaro fruit from me,
I wish them stricken with bad luck,
For when they touch the plant, they're stuck!
And they'll stick there 'til Misery
Decides it's time to set them free."

3/OLD MAN: "It is done!"

READER 6: said the old man. And away he went.

READER 1: The next morning Misery walked around her cabana and there she saw, stuck to her magnificent saguaro...

READER 2: a crowd of children and their babysitters,

READER 3: mothers who had come to rescue their children,

READER 4: boyfriends who had come to rescue the babysitters,

READER 6: husbands who had come to rescue their wives,

READER 1: two Harris Hawks,

READER 2: a Turkey Vulture,

READER 3: a Burrowing Owl,

READER 4: and an old coati.

READER 6: It was an extraordinary sight. For the first time in her miserable life, Misery burst out laughing. Then she freed everyone by saying,

5/MISERY: "Go on home and let me be. Stay away from Misery!"

READER SIX: And they did.

READER 2: Well, a few days later, Misery again heard a tap-tap-tapping at her door and again she called out,

5/MISERY: "Go on home and let me be. Stay away from Misery!"

READER 4: But a voice from the other side of the door said,

6/DEATH: "Open the door Misery. I am Death's messenger. You have lived long enough and I am here to fetch you and your old brown dog."

READER 1: Misery quietly opened the door and stared death right in the face. Without saying a word, she began to pack her few belongings into a cloth sack.

READER 3: As she packed, Death's messenger grew impatient and, to pass the time, strolled around to the back of the cabana. There he found the magnificent saguaro. Its delicious fruit sparkled in the summer sun. Death's messenger thought to himself,

6/DEATH: "I have been away from the fruit of the saguaro for too long. I will not leave again until I've had a taste of that red pulp."

READER 2: Then he picked up a discarded wooden pole nearby.

READER 4: Misery found him there, stuck to the pole, the pole stuck to his long bony hand.

READER 1: Now Misery had lived a long miserable life, but the thought of dying made her more miserable than she had ever been before. And she said,

5/MISERY: "Now that I've heard old death's call, life seems pleasant, after all!"

READER 3: So she let Death's messenger hang there. And as far as we know, he hangs there today and Misery still lives with her old brown dog...

READER 2: somewhere in the Sonoran desert.

READER 4: But if you should ever be hiking out in the sand and run into her, please don't bother her. Just remember to...

ALL: Go on home and let her be. Stay away from Misery!

THE END