



Coatimundis

The white-nosed coati (*Nasua narica* also commonly known as a coatimundi) is native to woodland areas of Central America, Mexico, and the southern United States. It is related to raccoons and ringtails but has a long snout and long, slender tail. Like the raccoon, it also has a dark facial mask and faint rings on its tail. White-nosed coatis have short legs with elongated front claws for digging and walk “flat-footed” like bears and humans.

The white-nosed coati is diurnal (active during daytime) and prefers woodland and riparian habitats but also likes rocky canyons. People often observe them in southern Arizona’s scenic canyons (Aravaipa, Madera, Ramsey, and others). Past anecdotal sightings have been recorded in Prescott too. Given their habitat preferences, it seems they have found a perfect habitat in the Verde Valley.



Juvenile white-nosed coati (*Nasua narica*, Caleb Slemmons, National Ecological Observatory Network, Bugwood.org).

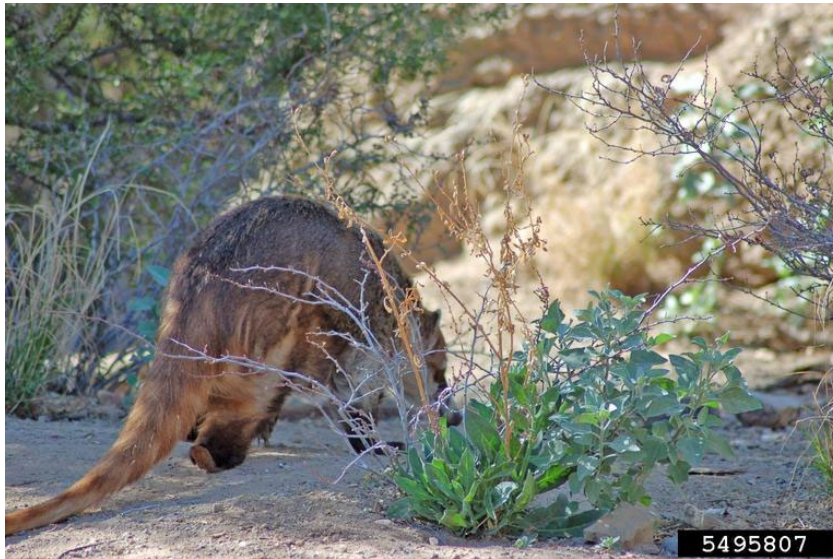
White-nosed coatis spend considerable time foraging on the ground, but they climb trees as easily as a squirrel. Their long tail seems to function like that of a squirrel, helping them maintain their balance. White-nosed coatis often live in mobile groups consisting of adult females, yearlings, and babies. Adult males are usually solitary most of the year. Coatis are omnivorous, consuming insects and other ground-dwelling arthropods, lizards, snakes, carrion, rodents, nuts and fruits of native trees, prickly pear, and yucca.

White-nosed coatis are believed to be fairly recent immigrants in Arizona. Some think their range extension from the mountains of northern Mexico was facilitated by the ready availability of carrion after the catastrophic drought and subsequent death of hundreds of head of cattle in the early 1890s. The first recorded Arizona specimen was taken from the Huachuca Mountains in 1892. Other sources surmise climate change could be a factor in their northerly advance.

For wildlife enthusiasts and tourists, these new residents provide excellent opportunities for observation. As with any wildlife species, it is unlawful to feed them (ARS 13-2927). Feeding wildlife usually results in the wild animal becoming habituated to human foods, a situation that never ends well for wildlife. Please resist the urge to feed wildlife other than birds. While occurrences are rare, white-nosed coatis have also been known to contract rabies. As with wildlife observation of any species, viewers should keep their distance and not try to interact directly with coatis. If any wildlife species is behaving uncharacteristically, contact animal control and/or the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

For farmers and gardeners, preventing crop damage by white-nosed coatis may prove challenging. They can easily climb fruit trees and fences that protect cultivated areas. I would imagine an electric fence would dissuade them when correctly placed. There are many fence designs and materials available for excluding raccoons. These should also be appropriate for excluding coatis. Some designs are: three hotwires spaced about four inches apart around the perimeter, one hotwire at the top of an existing fence, and electric poultry mesh. Having dogs that are free to roam the perimeter of cropped areas may also provide some protection from white-nosed coatis. Raccoons often elude dogs because the raccoon is nocturnal and dogs normally sleep at night. Being diurnal, white-nosed coatis may be more likely to be kept away by vigilant domestic dogs.

People are sometimes tempted to keep raccoons and coatis as pets. As with wildlife feeding, trying to domesticate a wild animal is never a good idea and often ends badly for the animal and the human. Keep your distance and respect their wildness.



Adult South American coati (*Nasua nasua*, Joy Viola, Northeastern University, Bugwood.org).

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