

Shrub Steppe

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The shrub steppe is a unique environment and home to many species of plants and animals. The contrasting scent of sweet sagebrush and dry dust mingle in the air, wafting over a land bursting with hidden life. Under the radiant sun, creatures stir and wake to forage, hunt, nest, and feed. Tough plants dominate the sandy soil, competing for valuable moisture and rare space. In ground between the wiry bushes, scrubby grass spreads. Old grass, dry and dead, covers the middle of each of the patches of tender green framed by shrubbery. Rustles in the sand-colored mass of stalks indicate rodents nestling down in snug burrows packed with soft bedding.

In this fertile world of wildlife, the harsh beauty is easy to enjoy. One of the things I treasure is the brilliant sunsets. The sun has crept to the edge of the horizon and is staining the clouds red. As the wash of blood-red scarlet floods over the sky, it mixes with pure oranges, pearly pinks, and outlines the patches of pure blue sky, perfected with touches of almost undetectable emerald. It seems the sun is swimming through a sea of unpredictable clouds, slowly sinking beneath the steep, hilly horizon. When at last darkness cloaks the landscape like a blanket, the world is transformed.

Coyotes prowl, stalking prey and wailing a lonesome howl to the ghostly moon. Their feral jaws bring an end to many lives. Owls swoop and wing away, clenching in their talons fat mice stuffed with seeds, a result of searching during the hot afternoon hours. As the hunt continues into the steely grey morning hours, light begins to leak from the edge of the sky. Then everything seems to hold its breath. After that, the clear sunrise begins, preparation for another day – solitude, rest, and feasting for some, exhausting group trekking to find food for others. One thing is sure for all. A repeat of the previous day.