

Desert Mistletoe A Tree thief

*Desert Mistletoe, stealing nutrients
and water from its host trees.*



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BELONGING to the genus *Phoradendron* which means “tree thief”, Desert Mistletoe (*Phoradendron californicum*) is native to the deserts of southern California, Nevada, Baja California, southern Sonora in Mexico, and Sinaloa. In some desert areas, it is also called by the name mesquite mistletoe. Although Desert Mistletoe obtains additional nutrients and water from the host trees and shrubs

upon which it grows, it is a hemiparasite which means it can also carry out photosynthesis in its green stems.

Desert mistletoe resembles a dense nest but it’s a dense cluster of brittle, jointed green stems that are leafless. The clusters grow up to 36 inches long in almost six to eight years, dangling down from the host. The Desert Mistletoe attaches itself to the host and steals their water and nutrients which may



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lead to the weakening and disfigurement of the host. The host trees of the Desert Mistletoes are nitrogen-fixing trees, for example, mesquite, ironwood, paloverde and acacias.

The berries of Desert Mistletoe are delicious food for many birds. Since the seeds of the fruits are very sticky, when consumed by the birds they stick to their beaks and feet. They spread the seeds of Desert Mistletoe as they clean their beaks

and wipe their feet on the branches of other trees and shrubs. The tough seed coat of the fruit seeds can also easily pass through the bird's digestive tract, and through their droppings reach the new host plant.

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