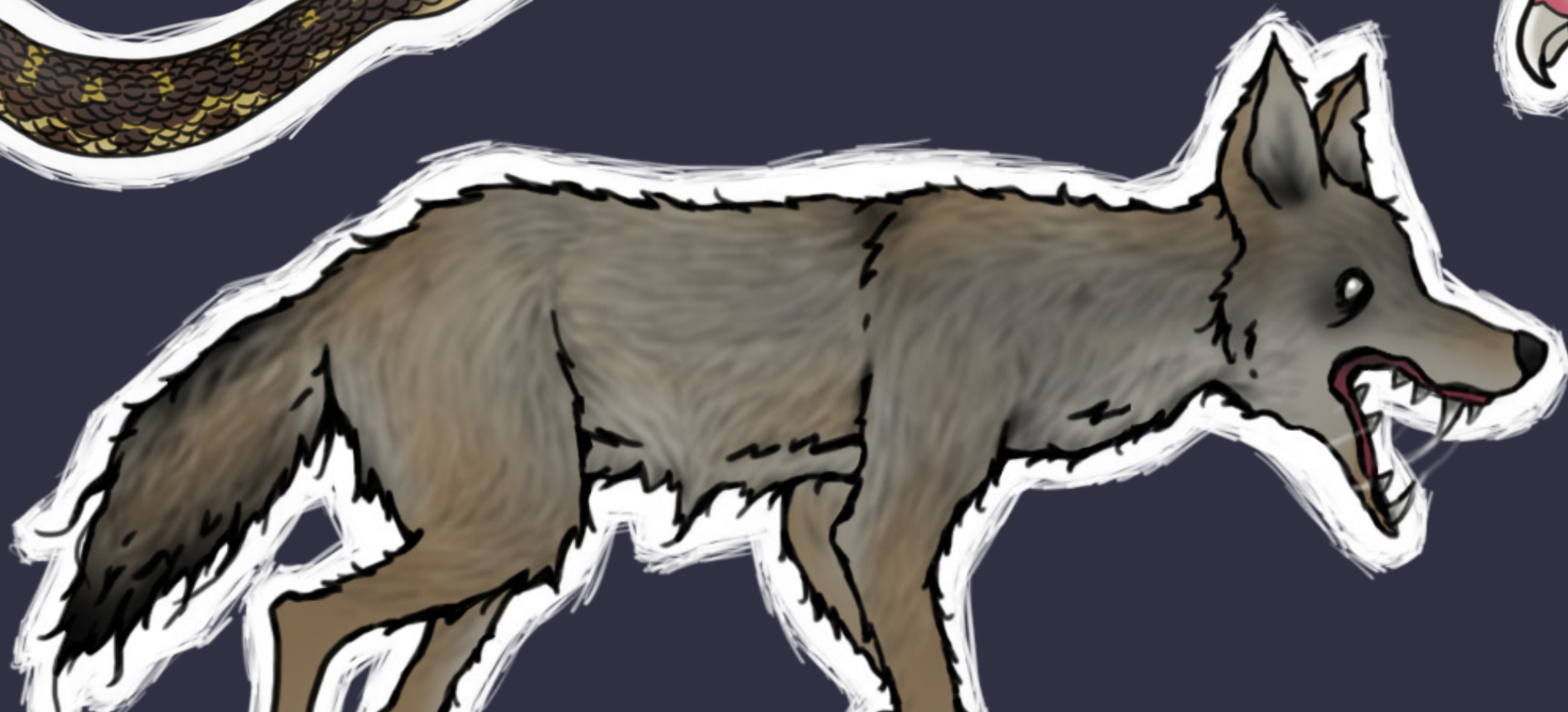




TreePeople



Five Creepy Crawly Creatures That are Crucial to Our Ecosystem





Bats

Bats are sometimes associated with vampires and blood-sucking. But in reality, the vampire bat is the only bat species that feeds exclusively on blood. Some bats feed on fruits or nectar, which makes them excellent seed dispersers and pollinators. And the majority of bats—including species common to Southern California like the Mexican free-tailed bat and the canyon bat—are extremely effective insectivores, helping to keep pest populations down and reduce the spread of disease.

Spiders

Speaking of pest control—let's take a moment to appreciate our hard-working arachnid friends. While spiders give some people the creeps, only a few species of these eight-legged creatures are actually dangerous to humans—and most will only bite if threatened. Spiders like Southern California's common orb weavers—which can boast eye-catching orange-and-black markings—should only strike fear into the heart of insects, which they capture in their intricate webs and store away for dinner. These spiders keep our pest populations in check and our ecosystem in balance.





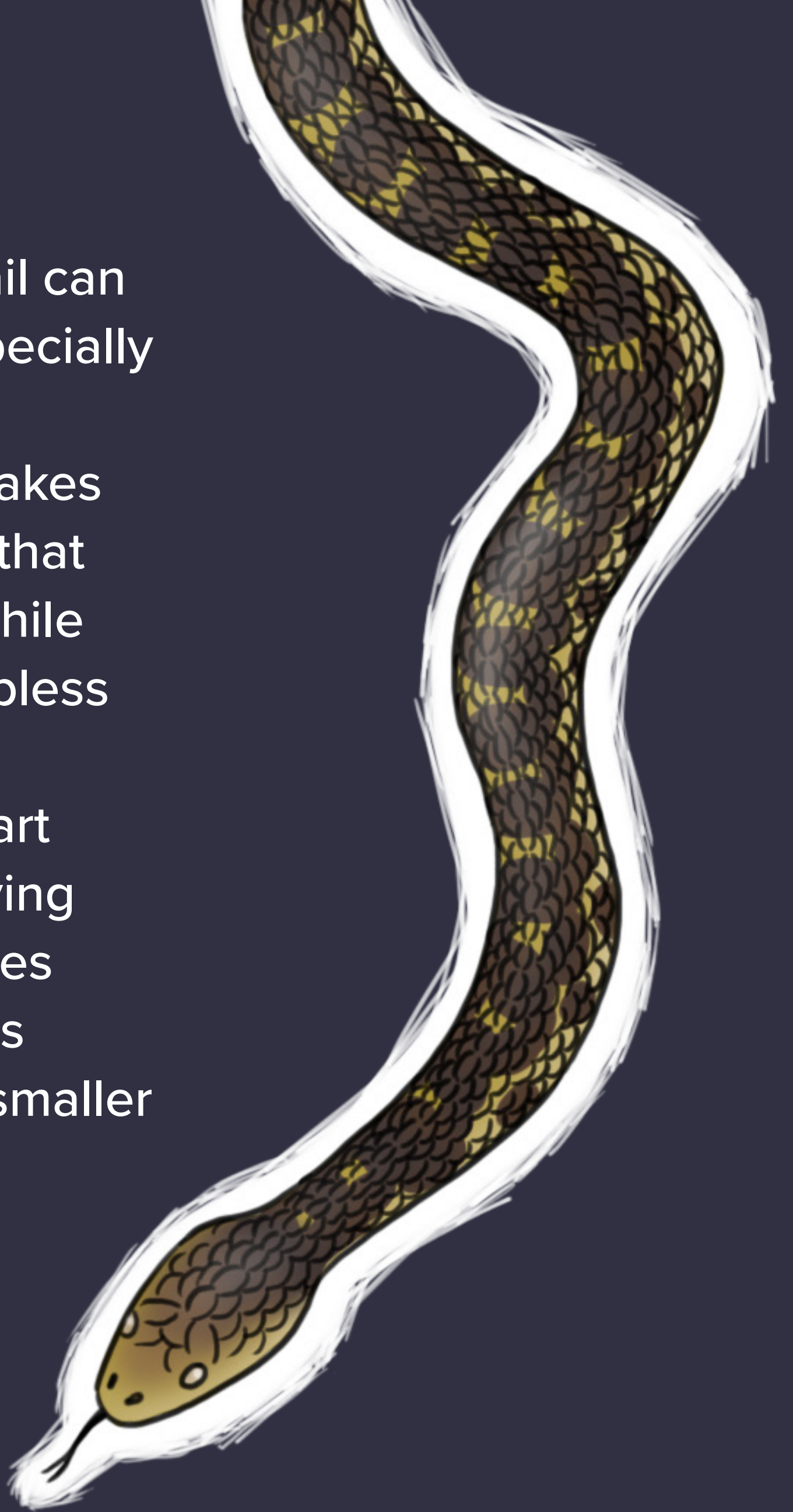
Coyotes

Hearing the yips and howls of a pack of coyotes at night can be an unsettling experience. And, as more of these creatures have migrated to LA's urban areas to prey on trash-loving rodents, they've become divisive. But these native canines are also quite misunderstood; though they look similar to wolves, they are far less likely to attack humans and are essential for keeping smaller animal populations in check—helping to promote biodiversity. While it's probably a good idea to keep your pets away from coyotes, it's also important to remember that they lived here long before cities were ever built, and Southern California is their habitat, too!

Snakes

Seeing a snake on a hiking trail can be a startling experience—especially if it's a venomous rattlesnake.

But here in California, rattlesnakes are actually the **ONLY** snakes that are harmful to humans. And while serpents—with their scaly, limbless bodies—are certainly strange to look at, they are a critical part of California's food chain: serving as both prey for larger creatures like hawks and some mammals and as a predator that keeps smaller rodent populations in check.



Vultures

With their strange bald heads and taste for decaying flesh, it's no surprise that vultures give some people the heebie jeebies. However, they are also nature's cleanup crew, helping to clear rotting debris that might otherwise spread disease and transform it into nutrients that are released back into the soil. So next time you see a flock of vultures pecking away at some roadkill, suppress the instinct to recoil and maybe offer them a well-deserved thank you instead.

