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## National Geographic Readers: Deadliest Animals

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Sharks, snakes, jellyfish, and more—these creatures are among the most threatening—and interesting—in the world!

<b>7-9</b>	<b>30-45 mins</b>	-	-
Age Range	Length	Lexile <sup>®</sup> Measure	AR Level

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# Deadly Surprises

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Huge teeth?  
Check.

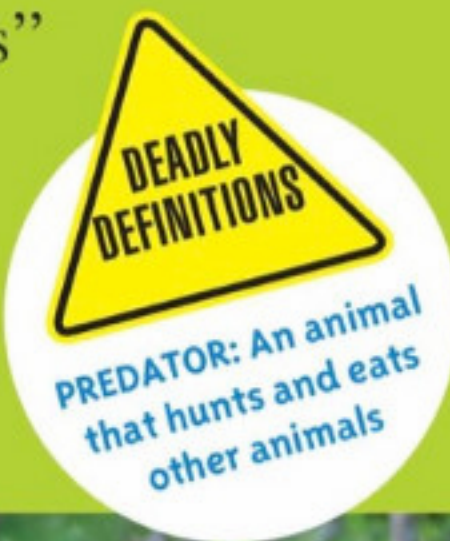


Razor-sharp claws?  
Check.



Fast and fierce?  
Check.

The African lion has all the features you'd expect to find in one of the world's deadliest animals. These powerful predators are skillful stalkers that usually hunt together in groups called "prides" and can take down prey ten times their size. That's why people often call lions "the kings of the jungle."





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But are lions the deadliest  
animals of all?



Not quite.



Lions certainly score high on the deadliest list, but they don't take the number one spot. And if you think all of Earth's most dangerous creatures are big, fierce hunters, you're in for some surprises.

### Surprise 1:

Some deadly animals eat only plants.

Red kangaroos spend their days quietly nibbling on grasses, but when they feel threatened, watch out! A hard kick in the chest can break a person's ribs and collapse the lungs.



### Surprise 2:

Some deadly animals are smaller than the palm of your hand.

Oak processionary (sounds like PRO-seh-shen-ary) caterpillars are only 2 inches long, but beware of their hairy bristles. They can cause rashes, asthma attacks, and even deadly allergic reactions.



**ALLERGIC:** When the body responds to something with a rash, breathing trouble, or even death

**VENOM:** A poisonous liquid inside some animals' bodies

### Surprise 3:

Some deadly animals may be closer than you think.

Rattlesnakes live throughout the United States, and they bite about 8,000 people each year. Even though rattlesnake venom is deadly, most people get treated quickly and survive.



# Mighty Hunters

## Polar Bears

The polar bear is the largest land predator alive today. Like a lion, a polar bear is a skilled hunter that knows exactly when and how to attack.



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The clever carnivore looks for a hole in the ice and waits. When a seal comes up for air, the polar bear pounces and grabs the seal with its sharp teeth.

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Q

Why do camels want to be like polar bears?

A Because polar bears know how to chill out.

A



DEADLY DEFINITIONS

CARNIVORE: An animal that eats the meat of other animals

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## Saltwater Crocodiles

Saltwater crocodiles are just as fierce as polar bears—and just as patient, too.

Lurking below the water's surface, a croc lies in wait for its prey. When an unsuspecting animal passes by, the 1,000-pound beast explodes out of the water, grabs its victim, and drags it under the water to drown. Yikes!

### Death Toll

The saltwater crocodile is the most deadly large predator. It can easily take down a water buffalo and has even been known to kill sharks off the coast of Australia.



PREY: An animal that is eaten by other animals



# Big and Brutal

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## Hippopotamuses

Hippopotamuses are usually gentle giants. During the day, they lounge and snooze in shallow water holes. At night, they lumber onto land and munch on grasses and leaves.

But if a boat gets between a hippo and the deep water or between a mother and her calf, the animal will panic. It may tip over the boat and attack the passengers with its powerful jaws.

**weird  
but  
true**

A hippo can outrun you on land and outswim you in the water. You don't stand a chance against an angry hippo!





**Q** Why were the elephants kicked off the beach?

**A** They were walking around with their trunks around.

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## Elephants

Like hippos, elephants are usually calm, peaceful animals. But when an elephant feels threatened, it will attack.

The huge herbivore can stab enemies with its tusks and crush them with its feet. Sometimes it grabs an attacker with its trunk and tosses the possible threat into the air.

Elephants are the largest animals on land, so they can do a lot of damage.

**DEADLY DEFINITIONS**

**HERBIVORE:**  
An animal that eats plants





## Cape Buffaloes

Large herds of Cape buffaloes graze hour after hour on thick grasses. It might seem like they're focusing on their food, but they're also on the lookout for danger.



### Death Toll

In Africa, Cape buffaloes are known as "black death" due to their dark color and ferocious nature.



When these huge, hulking animals feel angry or scared, they charge at enemies with their heads down. Often they charge together as a group. A stampede of Cape buffaloes can kill predators quickly with their sharp hooves and hooked horns.

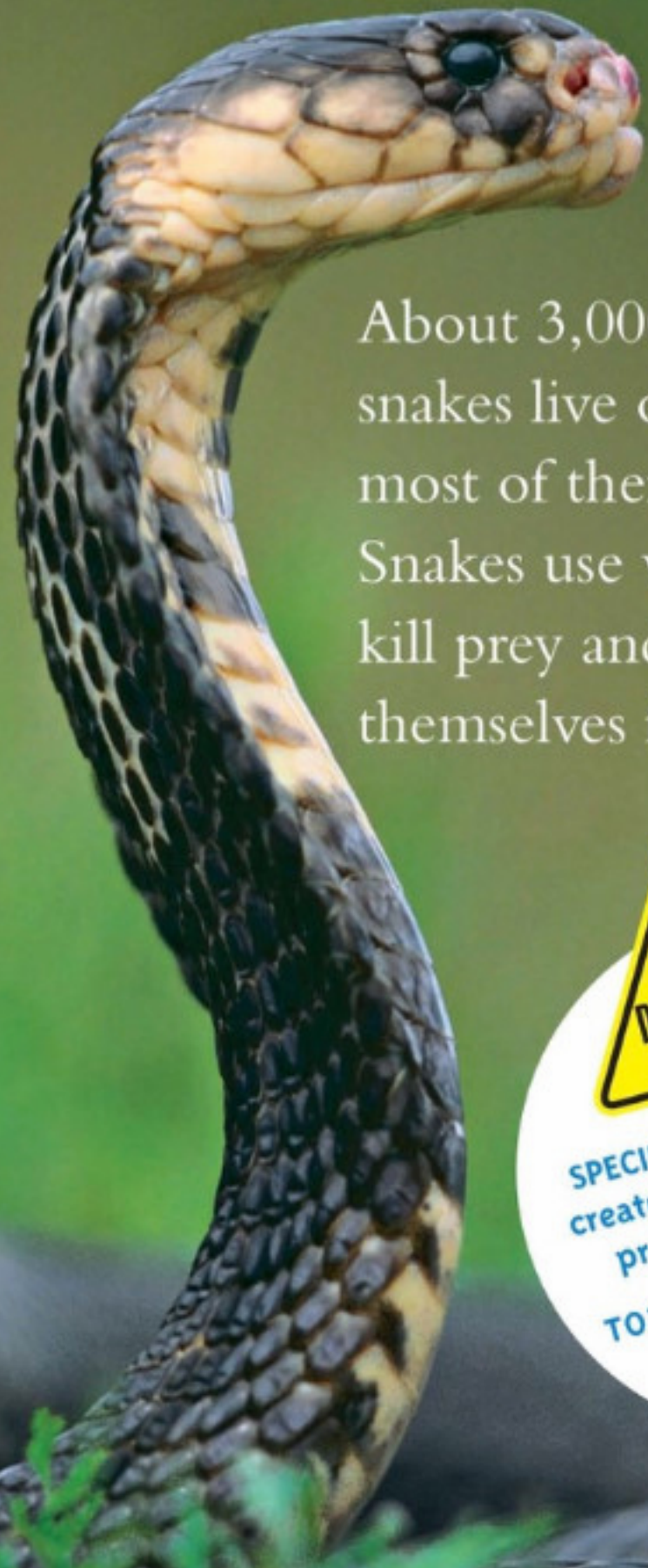


# Scary Snakes

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Q Why is it hard to fool a snake?

A Because you can't pull its leg.



About 3,000 species of snakes live on Earth, and most of them make venom. Snakes use venom to kill prey and protect themselves from enemies.

## DEADLY DEFINITIONS

**SPECIES:** A group of similar creatures that can mate and produce healthy young

**TOXIC:** Poisonous, capable of causing injury or death

Most snakes are too small or too shy to attack humans. But about 300 species can kill a person who's in the wrong place at the wrong time.



## Toxic Tidbit

The Indian cobra's venom isn't as toxic as the venom of some other snakes, but it often lives close to people and that makes it a major threat. Indian cobra bites kill thousands of people each year in Asia.



Golden Eyelash Viper



Green Pit Viper



Red-diamond Rattlesnake



Which snake is the deadliest of all?

That's a hard question to answer.

## Hook-nosed Sea Snake

This fish-hunting reptile lives in coastal waters and has the most poisonous venom of any snake. Just one drop can kill a person. Like other snakes, it has lungs and breathes air, but it can stay underwater for up to five hours.



## Russell's Viper

This snake lives in rice paddies and grassy areas of Asia and may bite farmers. Its venom isn't quite as toxic as the hook-nosed sea snake's venom, but it has more toxin in its body. That means it delivers more venom in each bite.

## Black Mamba

Other snakes may have stronger venom, but the black mamba moves fast and isn't afraid to attack. When an enemy gets too close, the black mamba raises its head high and hisses. If the predator doesn't back off, the snake strikes again and again.





# Ferocious Fish

## Great White Shark

The great white shark is the largest meat-eating fish in the ocean. The sight of its huge mouth and 3,000 jagged teeth would send shivers up anyone's spine.



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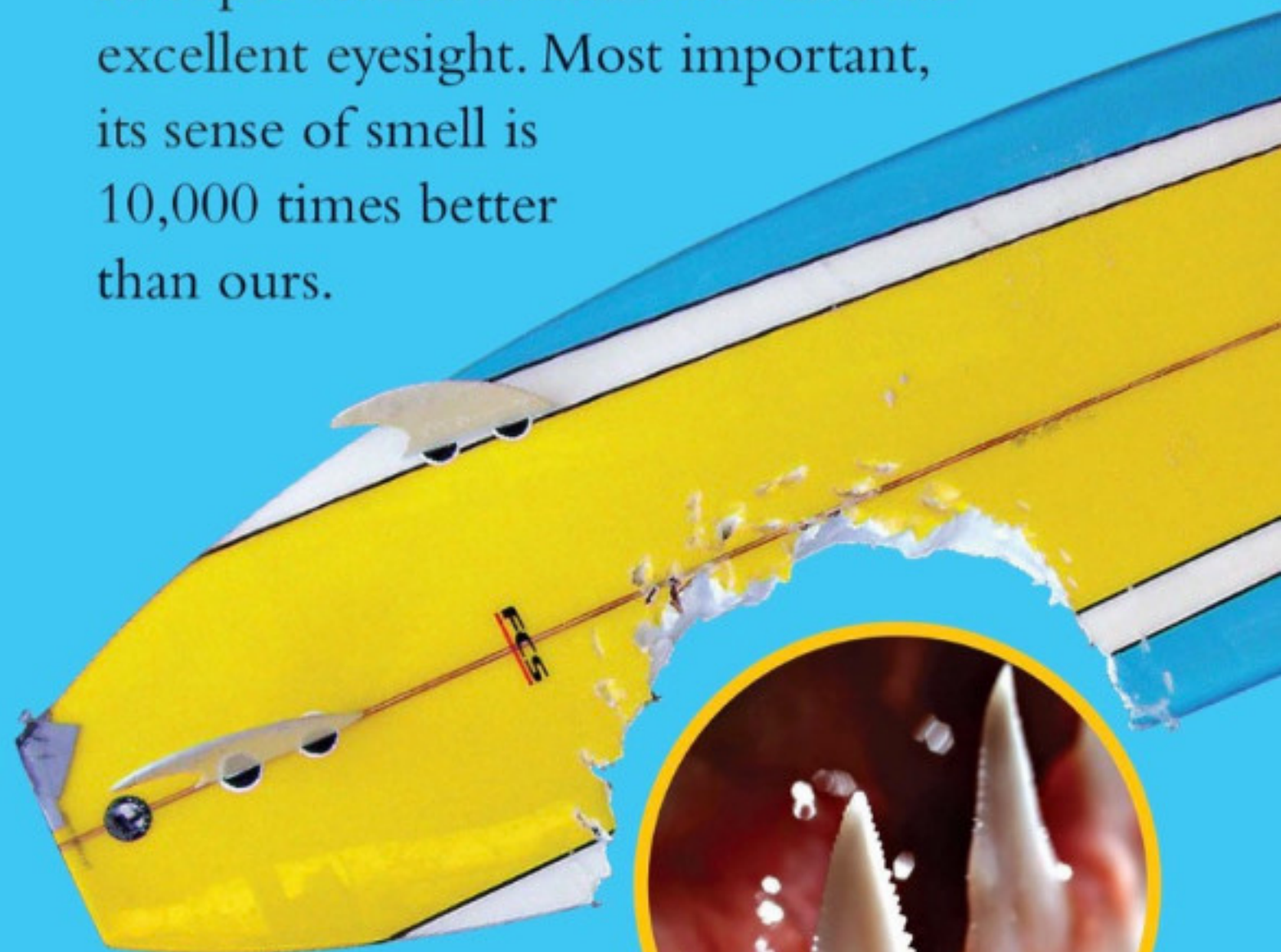
Q

What's the best way to talk to a shark?

Long distance

A

What makes this shark so dangerous? Its super senses. It hears well and has excellent eyesight. Most important, its sense of smell is 10,000 times better than ours.



weird  
but  
true

A great white shark can smell tiny amounts of blood in the water up to 3 miles away.



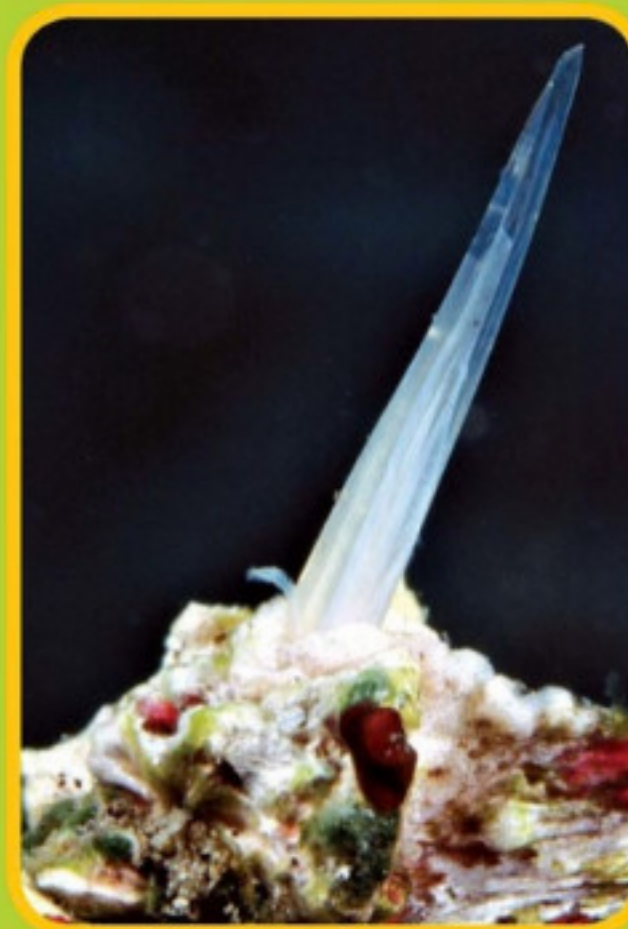


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## Stonefish

Stonefish are masters of disguise. Instead of swimming in search of food, they blend into their rocky surroundings and wait for prey to pass by.

If a hungry predator grabs a stonefish—or a person accidentally steps on one—thirteen spiky spines deliver a painful blast



of venom. The wound swells, the victim's muscles feel weak, and the area becomes paralyzed. If the person isn't treated, he or she could die.

DEADLY  
DEFINITIONS

PARALYZED:  
Unable to move



## Puffer Fish

When an enemy attacks, a puffer fish gulps water and blows up like a prickly balloon. But that's not the fish's only trick for protection.

If a predator manages to take a bite of a puffer fish, it gets a mouthful of nasty-tasting toxin. Yuck!

### Death Toll

Even though a puffer fish has enough toxin to kill 30 people, some people like to take risks. They eat puffer fish prepared by specially-trained chefs. Because the chefs sometimes make mistakes, the toxin kills about 100 people every year.





# 10 Cool Things About Deadly Animals

1  Female lions do most of the hunting, but male lions always eat first.

6  A jellyfish doesn't have a brain.

7  All snakes have teeth, but only snakes that make venom have fangs.

2  On hot, sunny days, a crocodile pants like a dog to stay cool.

3  Most young fish are called fingerlings, but young sharks are called pups.

8  If an octopus loses an arm, another one will grow in its place.

9  Some poison dart frogs contain enough toxin to kill ten people.

4  Baby hippopotamuses are born underwater.

5  If you shine a black light on a scorpion, it glows in the dark.

10  A honeybee has five eyes—three small ones on top of its head and two large ones in front.

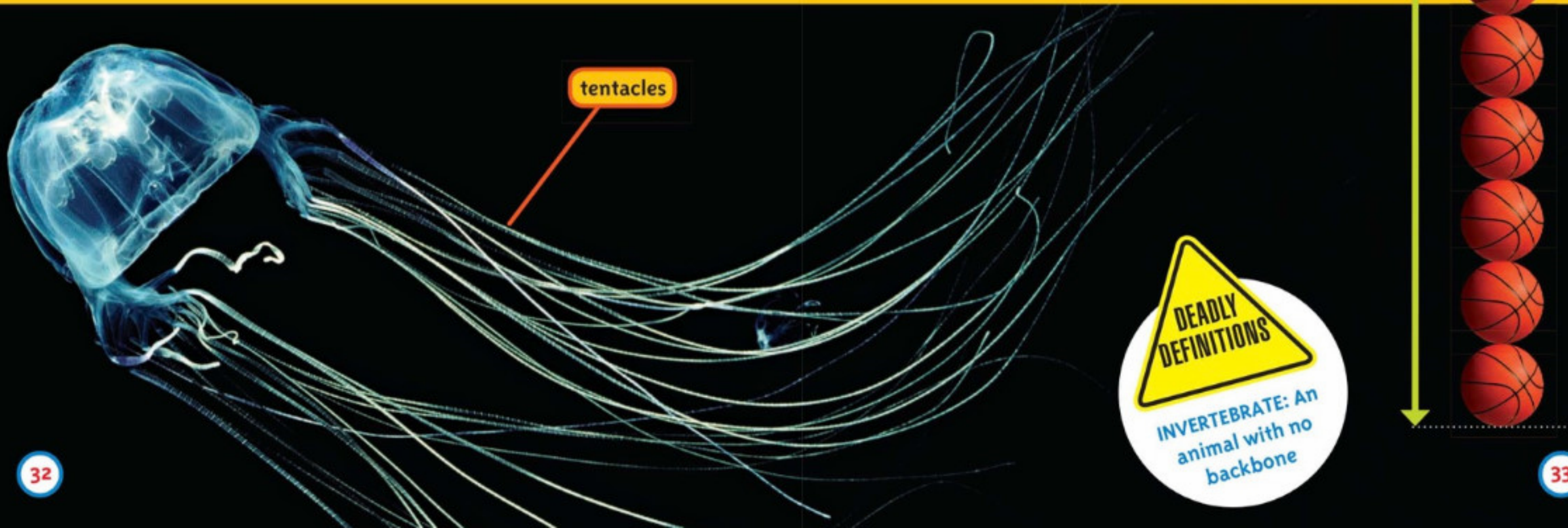


# No Bones About It

Fish aren't the only sea creatures that can be hazardous to your health. Some ocean invertebrates can be just as deadly.

## Box Jellyfish

You may have been stung by a jellyfish, but the box jellyfish is in a class by itself.



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## Toxic Tidbit

A box jellyfish's body is the size of a basketball, but its tentacles can be up to 9 feet long.

Each of its tentacles has thousands of tiny stinging cells. Together, they pack enough toxins to kill 60 people, and death can come in just 4 minutes.

Q

What do whales like to eat with peanut butter?

jellyfish.

A

body

tentacles



DEADLY DEFINITIONS

INVERTEBRATE: An animal with no backbone



## Blue-ringed Octopus

A blue-ringed octopus is the size of a golf ball, but it has a deadly bite.

Most of the time, the octopus uses its toxic saliva to catch crabs and shrimp. But its powerful poison can paralyze up to twenty people. Within minutes, anything that attacks this little octopus stops breathing and dies.



weird  
but  
true

A blue-ringed octopus's skin is usually yellowish brown. But bright-blue spots or rings suddenly appear when the octopus feels scared.





# Small But Deadly

The ocean isn't the only place on Earth with small, deadly creatures. They also live in fields and forests, wetlands and deserts.



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## Poison Dart Frogs



Scientists think that poison dart frogs eat toxic insects that make them deadly. Touch the slimy skin of these brightly-colored creatures and you could be dead in minutes.



### Toxic Tidbit

Some native rain forest peoples catch poison dart frogs, collect their venom, and rub it on darts they use to hunt. That's how the frogs got their name.





Q

What happened when the honeybee called its hive?

It got a buzzy signal.

A

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## Honeybees

Honeybees help us by pollinating many of our favorite fruits, vegetables, and nuts. But they can also be deadly.

About 1 in 4,000 people is severely allergic to bee venom and can die after just one sting if left untreated. But all the toxin from a stinging swarm of angry bees can kill anyone.

### DEADLY DEFINITIONS

**POLLINATE:** To transfer pollen from one flower to another, allowing plants to make fruit and seeds



**weird but true**

Bee bearding is the practice of attracting bees to the human body by hanging the queen from the chin.



## Scorpions

A scorpion's huge, claw-like pincers are its weapon of choice. But if a predator attacks or its prey puts up a fight ... ZAP! A swift strike with the stinger on its tail usually does the trick.



The stinger contains a hollow tube connected to two sacs full of venom. The scorpion controls the amount of venom its stinger delivers, so bigger victims get a bigger dose.

### Death Toll

Of the nearly 2,000 scorpion species alive today, only 30 or 40 have venom strong enough to kill humans. Still, thousands of people die each year from scorpion stings.



Q

Why do spiders spin webs?

A They don't know how to knit.

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## Sydney Funnel Web Spider

Small and shiny. Dark and deadly. That's how people in Australia describe the Sydney funnel web spider.

Most of the time, this spider uses its sharp fangs and deadly venom to catch insects and other prey. But if a person gets too close, the spider won't hesitate to bite.



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### Toxic Tidbit

Scientists developed medicine to protect people from Sydney funnel web spider venom in 1981. No one has died from its bite since.

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# Deadliest of All



So what's the deadliest animal of all?

The mosquito—that pesky little insect with the whiny hum!

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Mosquitoes carry some of the worst diseases on Earth, including malaria and West Nile virus. And when a mosquito sucks blood from an animal, germs can enter the victim's body. That's why it's a good idea to use bug spray when there are insects around.

From tiny mosquitoes to gigantic elephants, the world's deadliest animals come in all sizes and shapes. And they live in every habitat you can think of. But each of them has a special way of keeping themselves safe in a dangerous world.

## Death Toll

Each year, 2 to 3 million people die from diseases transmitted by mosquitoes.





# Glossary



**ALLERGIC:** When the body responds to something with a rash, breathing trouble, or even death



**CARNIVORE:** An animal that eats the meat of other animals



**HERBIVORE:** An animal that eats plants



**INVERTEBRATE:** An animal with no backbone



**PARALYZED:** Unable to move



**POLLINATE:** To transfer pollen from one flower to another, allowing plants to make fruit and seeds



**PREY:** An animal that is eaten by other animals



**PREDATOR:** An animal that hunts and eats other animals



**SPECIES:** A group of similar creatures that can mate and produce healthy young



**TOXIC:** Poisonous, capable of causing injury or death. A toxic substance is called a toxin.



**VENOM:** A poisonous liquid inside some animals' bodies