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opening extract from

100 Most Disgusting Things on the Planet

written by

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INTRODUCTION

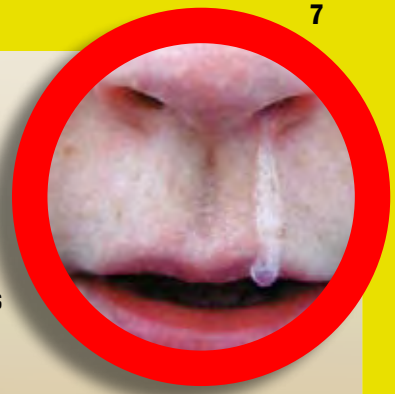
"Urggghh! That's DISGUSTING!" You might hear someone saying that if they see you picking your nose or find stinky, rotten food in your fridge. But what exactly does it mean to be "disgusting"? The word *disgusting* literally means something that tastes bad or makes you feel sick. There are lots of things that can do this, as you'll see in this book. Foods you find revolting, yucky body bits, nasty smells, and creepy-crawlies can all make you screw up your nose or back away in horror.

DISGUSTING TO YOU, DELIGHTFUL TO ME

A lot of "disgusting" things are only disgusting to some people and not to others. For example, someone who finds the idea of blue cheese completely revolting might be happy to munch on a fried grasshopper. Someone else might think eating grasshoppers is vile but love eating prawns, which would be extra-odd because grasshoppers and prawns actually belong to similar animal families – both have feelers, bulging eyes, and lots of wriggly legs.

WARNING!

This book describes a lot of unusual foods and other disgusting things. Whatever you do, do not try to copy anything you read in this book on your own. If you're in a restaurant that serves fried insects, for example, go ahead and try one. But don't try catching your own and eating it. It could be poisonous, dangerous, or carrying germs. It might even be an endangered species.



Snot, or mucus (see page 94), helps us to stay healthy, but we find it gross anyway.

LEARNING DISGUST

The truth is, we find many things disgusting because of our culture – the beliefs and values we grow up with. As a child, you learn what is disgusting from people around you yelling "Oh! That's gross", "Urggghh", and "That's disgusting. Stop that at once!" In some cultures, for example, eating insects is normal; in others, people think it's so horrible that they couldn't do it if they tried.

DEFINITELY DISGUSTING

So, is disgustingness only in the eye of the beholder? Not always. For example, almost everyone in the world finds poo disgusting. It smells so bad that we instinctively know we need to keep away. This natural reaction protects us from the dangerous germs in poo and helps us to stay healthy.

TOILET HUMOUR

When you were four or five, you probably thought it was incredibly funny to shout "poo!" Hey, maybe you still do! Maybe you're itching to turn to the rudest, yuckiest pages of this book and have a good giggle. This is normal, too. It's called toilet humour. In all cultures, there are things that are considered too private, rude, or disgusting to talk about. Because they are forbidden, people – especially children – often find them fascinating and funny. Go ahead, turn the page!

Many wild animals have their own revolting habits. Hippopotamuses, for example (see page 37), spin their tails around when they poo, spraying muck everywhere!

YUCK FACTOR

- ..... **A little gross**
- ..... **Quite off-putting**
- ..... **Yuck!**
- ..... **Really revolting**
- .... **Totally disgusting!**

DISGUSTING NATURE

From dung-munching beetles to flesh-eating maggots, from vomit-squirting baby birds to jelly-squirting cucumbers, from stinky mushrooms to plants that can gobble up a mouse – the natural world is full of truly gross living things. Of course, many of them are disgusting only to us – as far as they are concerned, they just survive, like all life on Earth. Read on to find out more about their horrible habits.

COCKROACH

You open your cupboard and reach in for a packet of pasta – uurrrrggggh! It's CRAWLING with cockroaches! Cockroaches (or "roaches") are insects that look similar to beetles. Like mice, they love sharing our homes and our food. They often make people jump, shudder, or run screaming from the room! But how revolting are they, really?

YUCK FACTOR!

No one loves them, but cockroaches only bother you if you give them food.

TOP TIP! **To keep cockroaches away, keep all your food wrapped and sealed well. Always wipe up spilt food, so there's nothing for them to nibble.**

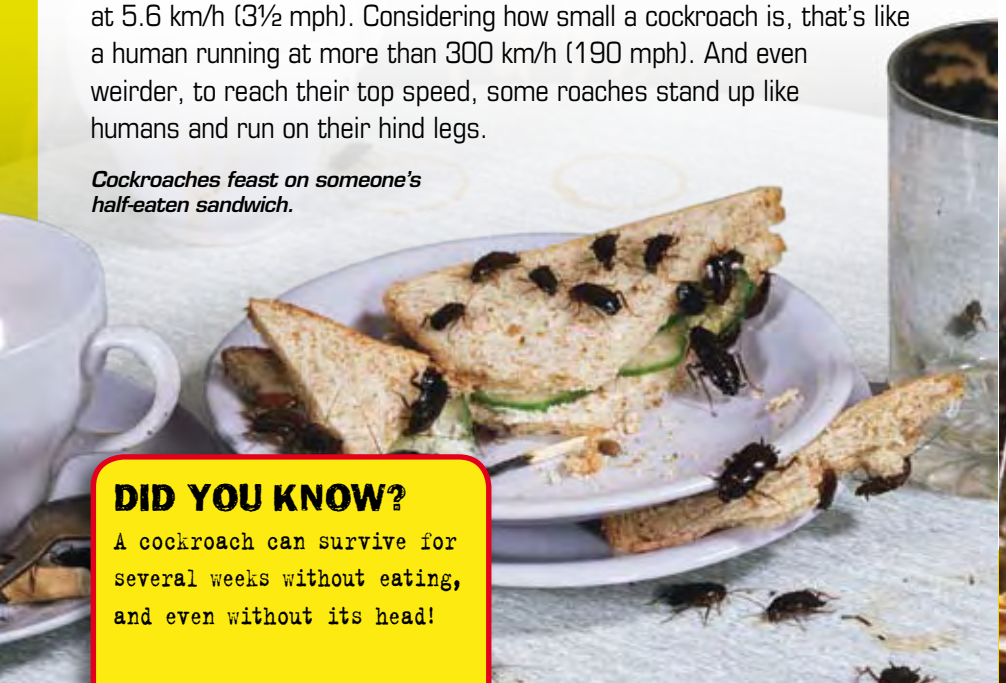
DISEASE SPREADERS

Cockroaches do some really disgusting things. They can spread dangerous disease germs. And if there's a big cockroach infestation, they can also give off a vile smell, which comes from cockroach poo and dead cockroach bodies. Yuck!

SPEEDY-CRAWLIES

Cockroaches can run really fast – and this may be one reason why people find them so unnerving. A cockroach can skitter across your floor at 5.6 km/h (3½ mph). Considering how small a cockroach is, that's like a human running at more than 300 km/h (190 mph). And even weirder, to reach their top speed, some roaches stand up like humans and run on their hind legs.

Cockroaches feast on someone's half-eaten sandwich.



DID YOU KNOW?

A cockroach can survive for several weeks without eating, and even without its head!

BLOWFLY

As flies go, adult blowflies are not disgusting to look at – they're amazingly beautiful, with their bright, metallic bodies in jewel-like blue and green. But what we do find disgusting is baby blowflies – otherwise known as MAGGOTS!

DEAD MEAT

Female blowflies seek out dead animals by their stinky smell and then lay their eggs in them. The eggs hatch into small, white, wriggly maggots, which look a bit like grains of rice. They feed on the rotting flesh and grow bigger and bigger. A dead sheep or rat can often be teeming with maggots.

ON THE MOVE

Next, the maggots have to pupate, or go into a cocoon, to turn into adults. They leave the rotting body and wriggle off in search of a good dry, safe place to pupate. If there's a dead mouse hidden somewhere in your house, the first sign might be when you find the maggots marching across the floor!

YUCK FACTOR!

Writhing, wriggling maggots are totally harmless, but can make some people feel ill!

CRIME CRACKERS

Forensic scientists can use maggots to find out how long ago someone was murdered. They can tell by how big the maggots in the body have grown.

Maggots cluster together in tight gaps and wriggle in disgusting, shiny heaps.

HOUSEFLY

Mmm, you've just come indoors and there's a tasty-looking cupcake sitting on the kitchen table. Should you eat it? Why not?! Well, if it's been sitting there uncovered in warm weather, a really disgusting housefly could have buzzed by and had a taste before you came along. And here's what THAT involves....

FLY FEAST

Houseflies have sponge-like mouths that can only soak up liquid food. So, after landing on your cake, a housefly spits and vomits onto it, to make the food mushy and break it down into liquid. When it's nice and runny, the fly sucks up as much as it can, leaving some spit and vomit behind. While feeding, flies also poo constantly, so they leave that behind, too!

MUCKY MAGGOTS

Like blowflies, houseflies lay eggs that hatch into wriggly maggots. They lay their eggs in rubbish or animal poo, which the maggots feed on.

TOP TIP! Keep all your food wrapped, covered, or in the fridge, especially in warm weather, unless you want it covered in fly spit, poo, and disgusting germs!

Buzzing, slurping houseflies feast on ham that has been left uncovered.

DISEASES

As they buzz around, flies can pick up all kinds of germs and parasites, such as deadly food-poisoning bacteria on raw meat, or botfly eggs (see page 13). They then leave these everywhere they land, so they can spread lots of nasty diseases.

YUCK FACTOR!

Few creatures spoil your lunch quite as badly as the housefly.

BOTFLY

YUCK FACTOR!

Being eaten alive by a wriggly, itchy botfly maggot takes the top revoltingness rating!

If you think blowfly and housefly maggots are disgusting, it's about to get a whole lot worse. Botfly maggots don't live in old, rotting meat. They don't live in rubbish, and they don't live in poo. They live inside, and feed on, other living animals – including horses, cows ... and humans. Totally gross!

EGGS ON YOUR SKIN

Botflies want to get their eggs onto the skin of their host (the animal they invade). They sometimes lay them directly on another animal's skin. But human botflies lay their eggs on an insect, such as a housefly or mosquito, which then leaves them on human skin.

BURROWING IN

When a botfly egg hatches, the maggot immediately burrows under the skin and hangs on with tiny hook-like parts. It feeds on blood, growing fatter and fatter. At last, it lets go and drops out of its host's skin onto the ground, ready to turn into an adult fly.

This is what a botfly maggot looks like once it's been pulled out of its cosy nest in your skin!

WHAT'S IT LIKE? Most people don't notice a botfly maggot in their skin at first – they just think it's an insect bite. But as the maggot grows, it feels horribly itchy, painful, and sometimes wriggly! You can also see a tiny air hole on the skin that the maggot uses to breathe through.

TARANTULA

Many people fear and loathe spiders and find them revolting – scientists are not sure why. But if you do feel like this about spiders, the most horrible of all are probably tarantulas – the biggest, fattest, and hairiest spiders in the world.

ARE THEY MONSTERS?

Tarantulas look terrifying, but they aren't actually the most dangerous spiders. Most can give you an unpleasant bite, about as bad as a bee sting – but they are not killers. They can be quite disgusting, though. They have sharp fangs that inject poison into their prey, and like some other creatures, they dribble digestive chemicals onto their food to liquefy it before sucking up the juice. They roll the dried-up leftovers into a tidy little ball. What nice manners!

HORRIBLY HAIRY

A tarantula's hairs help it sense other animals nearby by detecting vibrations from their movements. Many tarantulas also have special stinging hairs to repel predators. Some can actually flick these hairs right off their bodies at any animal that attacks them. These hairs can kill some small animals. They also give humans a nasty skin rash, and are dangerous if you breathe them in or get them in your eyes.

A tarantula devours a grasshopper.

YUCK FACTOR!

They look hairy and scary, but only some people find them revolting. Others keep them as pets!

DID YOU KNOW?

The world's biggest spider, the Goliath bird-eating spider, is a tarantula with a leg span of up to 30 cm (12 in). It can kill and eat small birds, lizards, frogs, and mice!

TARANTULA HAWK WASP

Worse than any tarantula is the tarantula hawk wasp. The female hunts tarantulas, paralyzing them with a potent sting. But she doesn't eat them. She drags the still-living spider into a burrow and lays her egg on it so that her baby has a fresh food supply.

EATEN ALIVE

When the larva, or baby wasp, hatches from the egg, it starts sucking bodily fluids from the tarantula's paralyzed body. Then, as it grows bigger and stronger, it burrows into the tarantula's body, eating it alive. It saves the organs for last, to keep the spider alive and fresh for as long as possible!

DIFFERENT DINNER

Adult tarantula hawk wasps don't eat meat. They feed on nectar and rotting fruits that contain alcohol, making them dizzy and unable to fly!

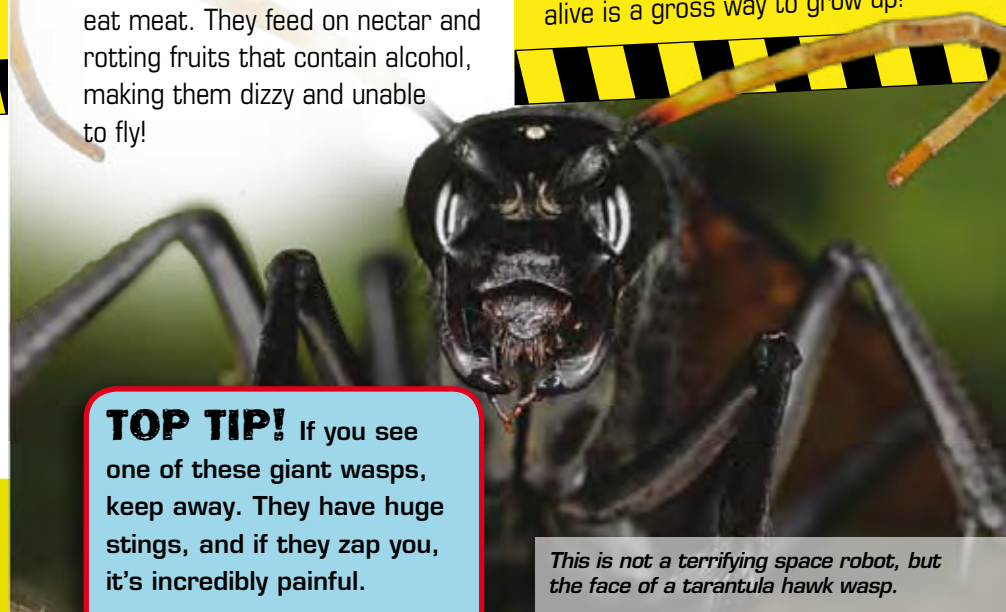
Here, a tarantula hawk wasp approaches its much larger prey, a big, hairy tarantula.

SIZE AND STRENGTH

Tarantula hawks are big for wasps – about 5 cm (2 in) long – but not as big as most tarantulas. They can sting and drag tarantulas much bigger than themselves.

YUCK FACTOR!

Eating a whole spider that's still alive is a gross way to grow up!



This is not a terrifying space robot, but the face of a tarantula hawk wasp.

TOP TIP! If you see one of these giant wasps, keep away. They have huge stings, and if they zap you, it's incredibly painful.

MILLIPEDE

Millipedes are the ultimate creepy-crawlies. They have more legs than any other animal on Earth. Their legs ripple in a wave-like pattern as they glide and slither smoothly through leaf litter and soil. They are mostly harmless, but many people are horrified by their shiny, plump bodies and tiny, wriggly legs – especially if they meet a giant millipede!

YUCK FACTOR!

Like many creepy-crawlies, millipedes can look scary and horrible, but they're not that bad!

MUD MUNCHER

Like earthworms, millipedes mostly mind their own business, burrowing through soil and rotting plants, munching as they go. They don't hunt or eat other animals, and if they're in danger they curl up into a tight coil.

LEAKING ACID

However, if under attack, some millipede species can release a stinging, burning liquid, or even a poisonous gas, from tiny openings along their bodies. It's strong enough to burn human skin, and it's good for putting off hungry millipede hunters, such as birds.

MONSTER MILLIPEDES

Most millipedes are only a few centimetres long. But the giant African millipede is a monster that can grow to be more than 30 cm (12 in) long and is as thick as your thumb.

DID YOU KNOW?

Most millipedes only have between 50 and 400 legs, but one was found to have 750!

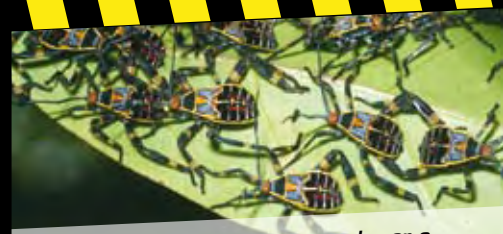
Imagine how this giant millipede must tickle as all its tiny legs skitter over your hands!

ASSASSIN BUG

The assassin bug certainly lives up to its name. This disgusting creepy-crawly likes nothing more than devouring its fellow insects alive by injecting them with spit that dissolves their insides, then slurping them up like a fresh smoothie.

YUCK FACTOR!

This beastly bug has a seriously revolting way of getting its lunch.



Brightly coloured assassins crawl over a leaf in a rainforest in Central America.

STABBING STRAW

The assassin bug's mouth is shaped like a long, sharp, flexible straw. It's so strong that it can puncture the hard exoskeleton, or shell-like covering, of other insects, such as beetles. The assassin bug sneaks up and stabs prey in the back when they aren't looking, sometimes grabbing hold of them with its sticky feet, too.

LIQUEFIED!

Next, the bug squirts its digestive juices into its prey's body, turning the insect's insides to liquid. Then all the bug has to do is suck it all up, leaving an empty husk. Their hunting technique enables them to feed on insects much bigger than themselves.

KISS FROM A BUG

At least assassin bugs are too small to eat humans! Well, not quite. Some assassin bugs, found in North and Central America, will also attack humans while they sleep, stabbing a soft body part, such as the lip, and sucking out some blood. Because of this they are called "kissing bugs". Lovely!

Aaarrgggh! There's no hope for this ladybird as an assassin bug spears it and sucks out its insides.

TOP TIP! As well as being disgusting, kissing bugs can spread a serious disease called Chagas disease. So don't forget your mosquito net!

GIANT JELLYFISH

YUCK FACTOR!

Giant jellyfish do look hideous to us – but probably only because they are so unlike ourselves.

How big can a jellyfish get? The biggest of all, the Nomura's jellyfish of Japan and the lion's mane jellyfish found in northern oceans, can grow 2 m (6–7 ft) across. That's wider than a man is tall! The lion's mane jellyfish can also be very long, with tentacles sometimes growing to an incredible 36 m (120 ft).

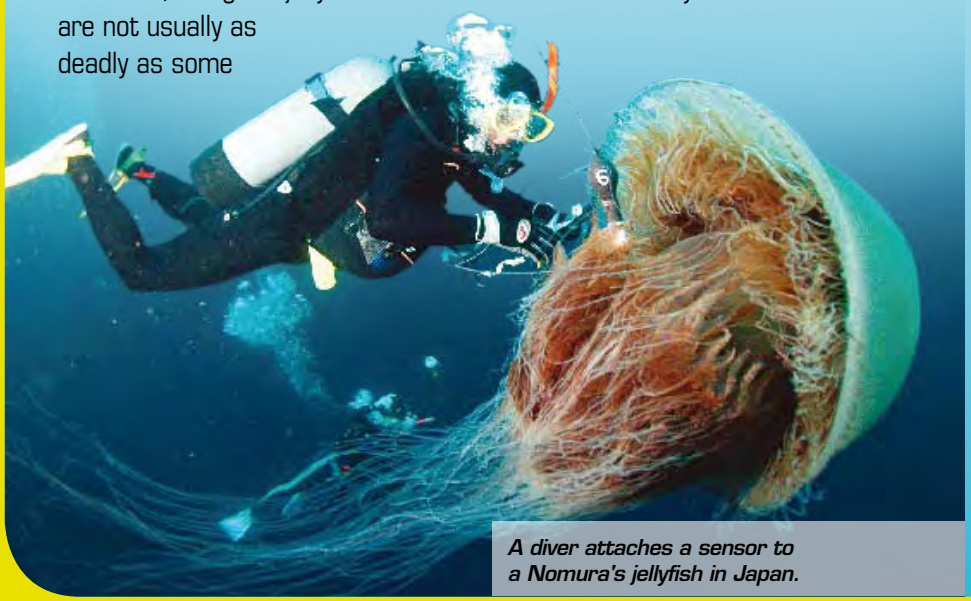
FRILLY, SLIMY, AND STRINGY

Many people find jellyfish strange and disgusting to look at. They have jelly-like, dome-shaped bodies, and tentacles and flappy arm-like parts dangle down from the underside, surrounding the mouth, which is in the middle.

Many jellyfish can give you a dangerous sting with their tentacles, but giant jellyfish are not usually as deadly as some smaller jellyfish. They don't feed on humans, and people don't usually get caught in them.

JELLYFISH PLAGUES

In the past few years, huge swarms of giant Nomura's jellyfish have been causing problems for Japanese fishing boats. They get caught in fishing nets, covering the fish with slime and jellyfish poison so that they can't be eaten.



A diver attaches a sensor to a Nomura's jellyfish in Japan.

STARFISH

What happens when a starfish wants to eat a tasty fish or sea slug, but it's too big? Simple! The starfish simply turns its stomach inside out, making its stomach poke right out of its body through its mouth, and wraps the stomach around its prey. The stomach then releases digestive juices that dissolve the victim alive. The stomach sucks up the dissolved prey and passes the creature to a smaller stomach inside its body.

STOMACH INVASION

Even having a strong shell doesn't protect other sea creatures from a marauding starfish stomach. Some types of starfish can use powerful suckers on their arms to prise open shellfish, such as clams and mussels. Then they insert their stomachs right into the gap and start digesting and liquefying the creature hiding inside!

SHOULD I BE SCARED?

The starfish's hunting method is bad news for a lot of sea creatures, and it's certainly disgusting. But the good news for us is that they don't gobble up humans. Most starfish are small. They range from about 2 cm (1 in) to about 50 cm (20 in) across, and they can only wrap their stretchy stomachs around things that move slowly. So you won't have your hand liquefied while going for a swim!

NEW ARMS

Starfish really can regenerate, or grow, a new arm if one is chopped off. It's even true that if a single starfish is cut into two pieces, each piece can regenerate, making two new starfish.

This starfish is using its curling arms to ensnare its prey – Antarctic krill.

YUCK FACTOR!

An inside-out stomach on the prowl is a horrible thought!