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extract from

Insiders Alive: Predators

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Big Cats

With razor-sharp teeth in bone-crushing jaws, the big cats are amazing predators. They are built for hunting, with muscular bodies, strong limbs and powerful claws. These magnificent animals include lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars and pumas. They are very well camouflaged, which means that their coats blend into the undergrowth so they are difficult to spot. They are skilled hunters, cunningly stalking prey before they pounce. As the top predators in their food chains, big cats have little to fear. Their only major enemies are the human beings who hunt them for their fur, their body parts and for sport.

Cat claws



At rest, the claws are hidden.

A cat's claws are some of its deadliest weapons—perfect for grabbing and bringing down prey. But they only appear when the cat needs them. Pull the tab to see these fearsome claws in action.

Pull

Cat coats

Many big cats have beautiful fur coats with distinctive patterns and colours.



Spots
A spotted coat camouflages a jaguar in the dappled light of its rainforest home.

Big cat habitats

The African grasslands are the main habitat of lions, cheetahs and leopards. Here, they track down hoofed animals, including zebras, antelopes, wildebeest and warthogs. In the rainforests of South America, jaguars stalk through the vegetation, while pumas live in forests and mountains all over North and South America.

Turtle crunch!
A jaguar has such sharp teeth and powerful jaws that it can crunch through a hard turtle shell.

Lady killers

Lions eat zebras, antelopes and other large animals. The females usually take care of the hunting. Here, a lioness bursts into a run to bring down an unlucky antelope.



1. On your marks
After stalking an antelope slowly, the lioness suddenly breaks into a sprint. The gap between hunter and hunted closes quickly.



2. Bringing it down
Once she is close enough, the lioness grabs the victim with her powerful front claws and pulls it to the ground.

3. A swift finish
The lioness usually kills her prey with a bite to the throat. She shares the kill with the rest of the pride. Once they have eaten enough, they leave the carcass to be picked over by vultures and wild dogs.

Protecting the kill

A leopard drags its warthog meal up into a tree to keep it safe from hyenas and wild dogs. It is the only big cat to do this. The leopard's amazing strength means it can carry an animal up to three times its own weight!

Killers of the Sea

The most feared fish in the sea, sharks are the perfect predators. A shark's strong, streamlined body slices through the water like a torpedo, powering after prey. Then, armed with a mouthful of sharp, serrated teeth, a shark rips its victim to shreds. The dreaded great white shark roams coastal waters searching for seals, sea lions and dolphins with its superb eyesight and sense of smell. Despite its deadly reputation, the great white does not usually prey on humans. Not all sharks are fearsome hunters. Many eat small fish, clams and shellfish. The largest shark of all, the whale shark, eats only plankton and tiny animals.

Sight and smell

Great white sharks have excellent eyesight. They can see a long way even in dark water, and they sometimes lift their heads above the surface to have a look around. Their sense of smell is amazing—they can detect a drop of blood in the water from 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) away.

Super senses

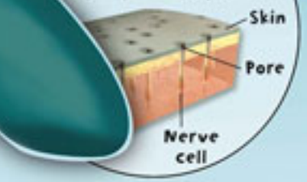
A shark's lateral line is a row of little sense organs that runs the length of its body. These organs pick up movements and vibrations in the water, helping the shark to track down prey.

Jaws

A shark's razor-sharp teeth grow in rows. When one row wears out, the row behind takes its place.

Peculiar pores

Special pores in a shark's snout allow it to pick up electrical signals given off by prey.



Greedy starfish

Large parts of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia have been eaten by crown-of-thorns sea stars. The sea stars themselves are eaten by giant triton sea snails. But humans have harvested so many giant tritons that sea star numbers are growing quickly, meaning the reef is at risk.



Blue-ringed octopus

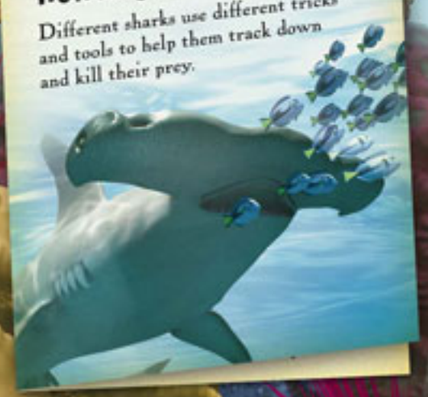
One of the most venomous creatures in the sea, this tiny octopus can kill prey in seconds. Its poison is so powerful that it can paralyse a person in less than three minutes. The octopus warns predators of its toxic bite by flashing its blue rings.

Lightning attack

In the blink of an eye, a reef cuttlefish can lash out at prey with its [illegible].

Hunting strategies

Different sharks use different tricks and tools to help them track down and kill their prey.



Hungry crabs

On coral reefs, crabs eat almost anything, from other crustaceans and algae to ocean debris.

Flower power

Flower-like sea anemones use their poisonous tentacles to catch and kill their prey.

Triggerfish

The triggerfish spurts jets of water at starfish and urchins to dislodge them from coral and rocks. Then it uses its powerful jaws and sharp teeth to devour them.