Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Predators

Written by

Steve Backshall

Published by

Orion Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in Great Britain in 2011
by Orion Children's Books
a division of the Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Orion House
5 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA
An Hachette UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Steve Backshall 2011

The right of Steve Backshall to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Orion Publishing Group.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 4440 0417 5

Printed in Great Britain

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

www.orionbooks.co.uk

This book is dedicated to my deadly crew.
To the production staff who labour tirelessly over our vast risk assessments
and make everything work like clockwork, to the crew on the road,
with all their ideas, enthusiasm and patience, and to my camera and soundmen,
constant companions who follow me into the murkiest of swamps
and darkest oceans just 'cos I tell them it'll be OK!
Thank you all.
SB

The Most Lethal Animals on Earth

Over the last few years, I've been lucky enough to circle the planet many times as I've searched for lethal beasts, with the aim of capturing them on camera and trying to work out what makes them so special. My adventures have given me some of the most extraordinary experiences of my life, and provided endless excitement and moments of euphoria. In a spooky, abandoned gold mine in Northern Australia I became the first person ever to film carnivorous ghost bats. I've swum with shoals of hungry piranhas and sharks, I've held a lion's paw in my hand, and I've been charged by crocodiles as well as a tiger, an elephant and a hippo.



In all that time, the only nasty injury I've had is a nip from a spectacled caiman – and that was because I stepped on it in the swamps of Argentina. Ten stitches and a great scar is all I have to show for years and years of coming face to face with the animals we consider the most dangerous in the world – proof, if you need it, that these wondrous beasts bear us no malice and are truly more frightened of us than we are of them.

Human beings will always be fascinated by predators, the scintillating creatures that make a living by catching and killing other animals. Our own species is first known to have stood upright and used tools about three million years ago, and for the vast majority of the time since, we have lived surrounded by wild animals. Knowing which animals could harm us, and being interested in how they work, would have given us an evolutionary advantage and kept us alive. Nowadays we live in a very different world, in which animals pose us little or no threat, but we still maintain the vestiges of our caveman past and part of that is our deep-seated desire to know more about predatory animals.

For me, this goes way past the common preoccupation with sharks and snakes. The question I get asked most (after "what is your favourite animal?") is "which is the most deadly animal in the world?" Well, if you're talking about deadliest to us, the answer is the *Anopheles* mosquito because of the diseases it spreads. You're more likely to be killed by a falling soft drinks machine than you are by a shark in the modern world. If you're talking about animals in general, though, I think every predator is equally deadly, and equally worthy of consideration. After all, the humble ladybird scoffing down aphids on our rose bushes is just as perfectly adapted to its job of catching its food as tigers are to their role as top predators. In fact, if you look at ladybirds' ratio of successful hunts, their diversity and their numbers, then they are far more successful than tigers!

This book looks at what it is that makes predators excel in their chosen method of hunting. We go beneath the skin of animals to see how their physiology drives their actions and learn how a creature's skeleton or teeth define the way it goes about its business. We examine how senses allow hunters to track and focus on their food, and discover the super-senses some animals possess that make us humans seem positively bereft. And we also find out how behaviour, teamwork and intelligence can come together to make an organism more than the sum of its parts.

This is the story of the most lethal animals on Earth – the Predators.



Speedy Snakes

Snakes might not have legs, but they can move surprisingly fast. Believe it or not, snakes evolved from animals with legs, similar to modern lizards. Over millions of years they lost their legs as they became so good at moving without them – legs just got in the way. Some snakes today still have little bony spurs that show where the pelvis and back legs used to be. Snakes have different ways of moving, depending on where they are and what they are doing.



WATCH OUT! The death adder has the fastest strike of any snake – less than 1/15th of a second.

BLACK MAMBA
This is the longest venomous snake in Africa – up to 4.5 metres long, which is longer than two very tall people lying head to toe. It is said to be the fastest snake in the world, able to move at 20 km/h, but I've run alongside one and kept pace easily. The same cannot be said of snakes such as coachwhips and some racers.



Chasing a glossy racer

This snake led me a merry dance as it whizzed up bushes, across the ground and through water, barely changing pace in the different environments. Many snakes can move just as fast in water as they do on land. Their sleek outline causes little drag and they make undulating movements to whip their bodies through the water.



GLOSSY RACER
This snake was nearly too fast for me to catch! It grows up to 1.2 metres long.

SPEED

Concertina: Snakes often move like this when climbing. The snake finds something to grip onto with its belly scales and pushes its head forwards. It then pulls up its back end and starts again.



Serpentine: This is the way most snakes move in water, weaving the body from side to side and pushing against the force of the water. On land, the snake moves in a similar way, pressing its body against any little lumps and bumps on the ground to push itself forward.



Sidewinding: This method is used by snakes moving on sand where there's little to push against. The snake throws itself along in sideways waves, with only two parts of its body touching the ground.



Rectilinear: This is a slow, rippling movement, useful when a snake is stalking prey on the ground and doesn't want to attract attention. The snake uses its belly scales to push against a friction point on the ground and move itself forwards to the next point.

