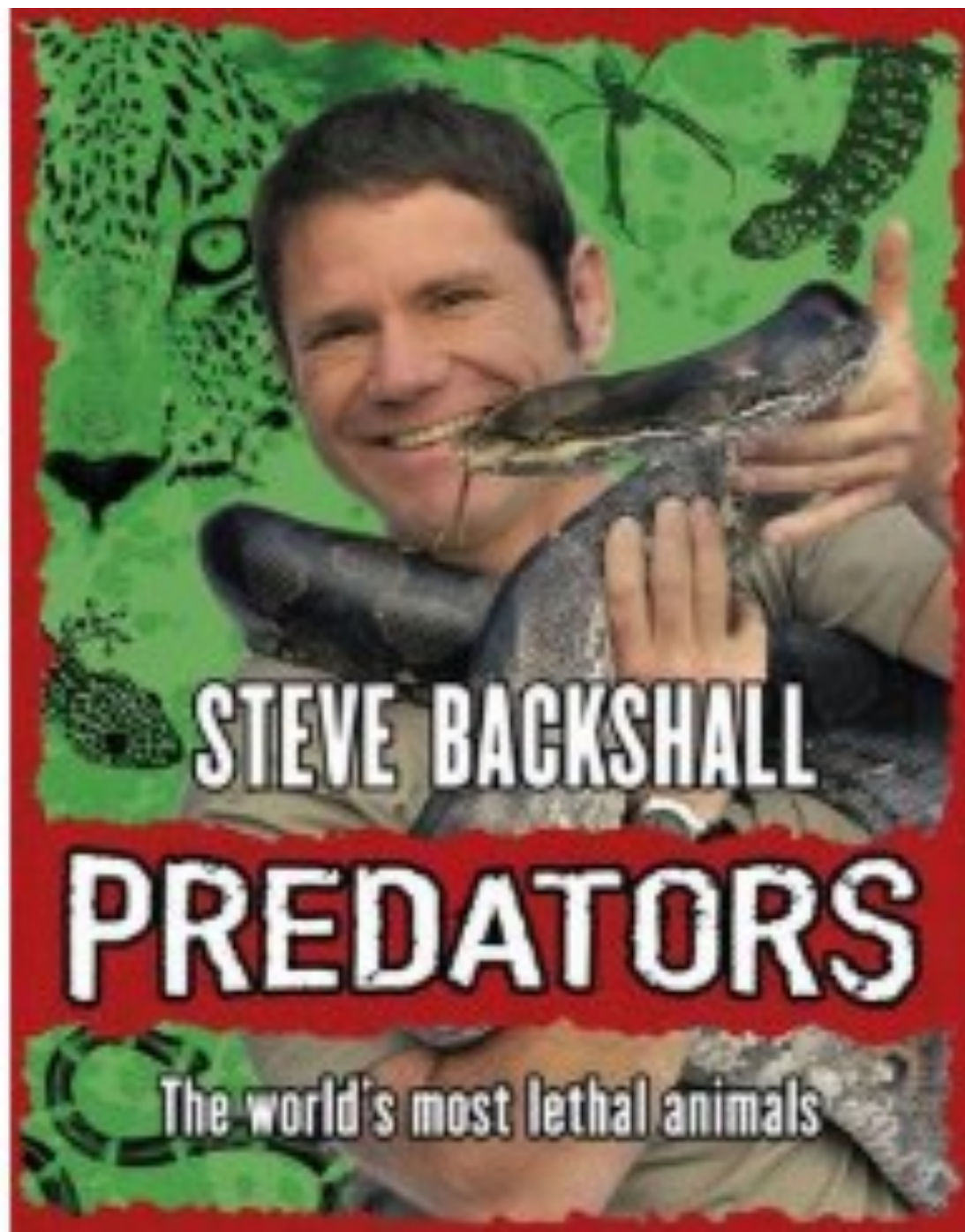




STEVE BACKSHALL

PREDATORS

The world's most lethal animals

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.

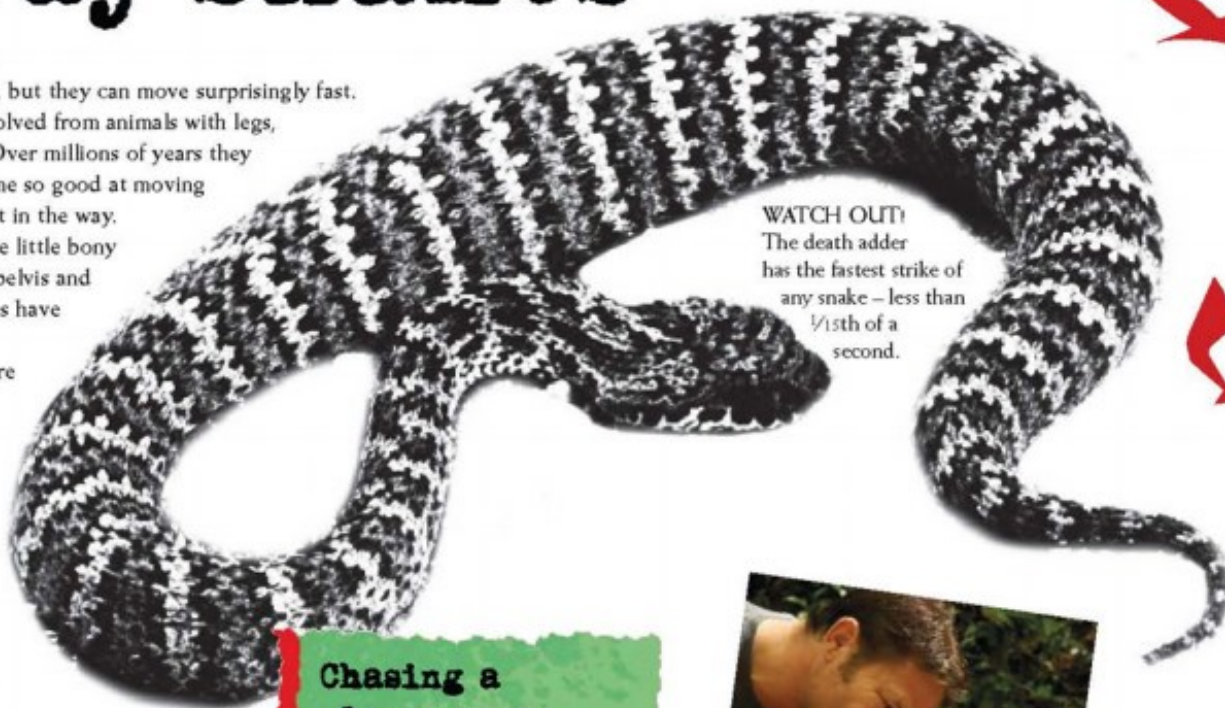


Speedy Snakes

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.

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.



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

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.



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100 MOST FEARED CREATURES



Scholastic Inc.

FEARSOME CREATURES

Watch out! The world is full of scary creatures that can sting, bite, poison, ram, or trample you if you annoy them or just get too close. They could be tiny, like the bullet ant, with its nightmarishly painful sting, or huge, like a charging elephant. Deadly animals live in all kinds of places, from the bottom of the sea to the attic of your house. Some even survive by burrowing inside you and munching on parts of your body!



Ahhhhhhh! Help!

Don't worry too much! The good news is, most of these dangerous beasts will leave you alone if you leave them alone. They mainly live in faraway places, or safely tucked away in zoos. Luckily, there are medical treatments for most types of dangerous animal bites and stings.



It makes sense to be careful and stay a safe distance from creatures. Never chase, tease, bother, or try to pick up animals you find in the wild, especially things like snakes and scorpions—as if you would! You should never try to eat any kind of wild living thing either; plant or animal. And if anything ever does bite or sting you, see a doctor immediately.



Each fearsome creature in this book has its own scariness rating like this:

- ▲▲▲▲ Doesn't scare me!
- ▲▲▲▲ Watch out. Could be scarier than it looks.
- ▲▲▲▲ Prepare for a scare!
- ▲▲▲▲ Seriously scary.
- ▲▲▲▲ Be afraid. Be VERY afraid!



VIPERS

There are more than 200 types, or species, of vipers, and they're all scarily venomous. With their long, sharp fangs and powerful bodies, most of them can bite fast and hard.

5



GABOON VIPER

LENGTH: 4–7 feet (1.2–2.2 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Fangs up to 2 inches (5 cm)—the longest of any venomous snake.

SCARY SKILLS: Can swivel its eyes around to look in different directions.



4

RATTLESNAKE

LENGTH: 3–8 feet (1–2.4 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Powerful venom that eats away at flesh. Yuck!

SCARY SKILLS: Uses the rings of dried skin on its tail to make a spooky rattling sound as a warning.



3



PUFF ADDER

LENGTH: 3–5 feet (1–1.5 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Extra-long fangs that can inject deep into the skin.

SCARY SKILLS: Can inflate and puff up its body to look even scarier.



2

TERCIOPELO

LENGTH: 4–7 feet (1.2–2 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Like most vipers, the terciopelo has heat-sensing pits on its face that can detect prey by their body heat.

SCARY SKILLS: Most snakes flee from danger, but the terciopelo is known to stand its ground and attack people!



RUSSELL'S VIPER

The brown, spotted Asian Russell's viper lives in farmers' fields, where people often disturb or step on it by mistake. When it bites, its venom causes terrible pain, swelling, and bleeding all over the body. Yikes! Medicine can save you, but many victims live too far from a hospital to get there in time.

LENGTH: 3–5.5 feet (1–1.6 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Powerful jaws that clamp tight and hang on after biting.

SCARY SKILLS: Can strike with so much speed and energy that it almost leaps into the air!



Vipers can fold their venom-injecting fangs flat when they're not needed, then flick them forward in the blink of an eye—ready to strike.

COBRAS

Rearing up, swaying from side to side, and spreading out their necks into wide "hoods," cobras are well-known and widely feared in Asia and Africa, where they live.

5



FOREST COBRA

LENGTH: 4.9–9.8 feet (1.5–3 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Aggressive attitude and very toxic venom.

SCARY SKILLS: Unusually adaptable; can live in towns and climb trees.

4

KING COBRA

LENGTH: 8–18 feet (2.4–5.5 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Its huge size—this is the longest venomous snake in the entire world.

SCARY SKILLS: Its hiss makes a frightening growling noise!



3



GIANT SPITTING COBRA

LENGTH: Around 9 feet (2.7 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Large venom glands that can inject a massive dose of deadly poison.

SCARY SKILLS: Can shoot a jet of blinding venom into enemies' eyes.

2

PHILIPPINE COBRA

LENGTH: 3–5.2 feet (1–1.6 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Deadliest venom of any cobra, causing paralysis and breathing problems within 30 minutes.

SCARY SKILLS: Can spit venom accurately a distance of up to 10 feet (3 m) away!



SPECTACLED COBRA

Also called the Indian cobra, this snake is one of the most famous and feared in all of Asia. Thousands of people are bitten each year. Its venom acts so fast—stopping the heartbeat or the ability to breathe—that many don't survive.

LENGTH: 5–8 feet (1.5–2.4 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Killer venom and a bold attitude.

SCARY SKILLS: Spreads its "hood" to reveal spectacle-like markings on the back of its neck.



KILLER FACT

Cobras spread out their "hoods" by flattening out the rib bones in their necks. Unlike humans and most other animals, snakes have ribs all the way down their bodies.



SEA SNAKES

Did you know that some snakes live in the sea? They have flattened bodies and tails to help them swim, and deadly venom for attacking prey.

5



BANDED SEA KRAIT

LENGTH: 2–5 feet (0.6–1.5 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Extremely deadly venom, though it rarely bites.

SCARY SKILLS: With out—this sea snake also comes ashore and climbs trees!

4

YELLOW-BELLIED SEA SNAKE

LENGTH: 2–3 feet (0.6–0.9 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Dangerously deadly venomous bite.

SCARY SKILLS: Can stay underwater for three hours before coming to the surface to breathe.



3

OLIVE SEA SNAKE

LENGTH: 3–5 feet (0.9–1.6 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Its sharp fangs are the longest of all the sea snakes and can even bite through a wet suit.

SCARY SKILLS: Its tail can detect light, like an eye, but experts don't know what this is for!



2

STOKES' SEA SNAKE

LENGTH: 4–6 feet (1.2–1.8 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Big bulky body gives it lots of strength.

SCARY SKILLS: Wraps itself around victims and holds on tight while biting them.



BEAKED SEA SNAKE

Most sea snakes are naturally shy, but the beaked sea snake is bad tempered and aggressive.

When it gets annoyed, it doesn't swim away, it attacks. That's unlucky, because the venom in just one bite of this sea snake is powerful enough to kill more than 50 people!

LENGTH: 2–5 feet (0.6–1.5 m)

DEADLY WEAPONS: Venom that experts believe is the most toxic of any sea snake.

SCARY SKILLS: Hides by lurking in shallow, muddy water near the shore.



KILLER FACT

Sea snakes have thin, breakable fangs. If one bites you, its fangs can snap off and get stuck in your skin. Ouch!