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see how we live

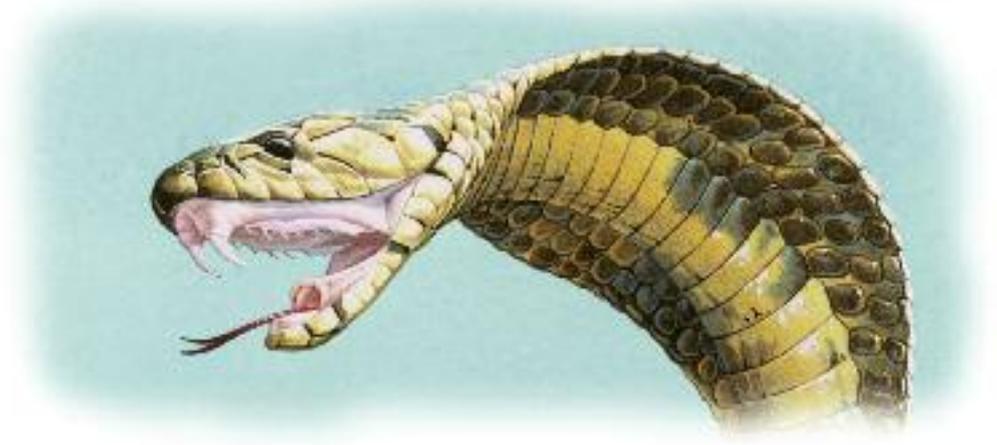
Crocodiles and other reptiles



 Orpheus

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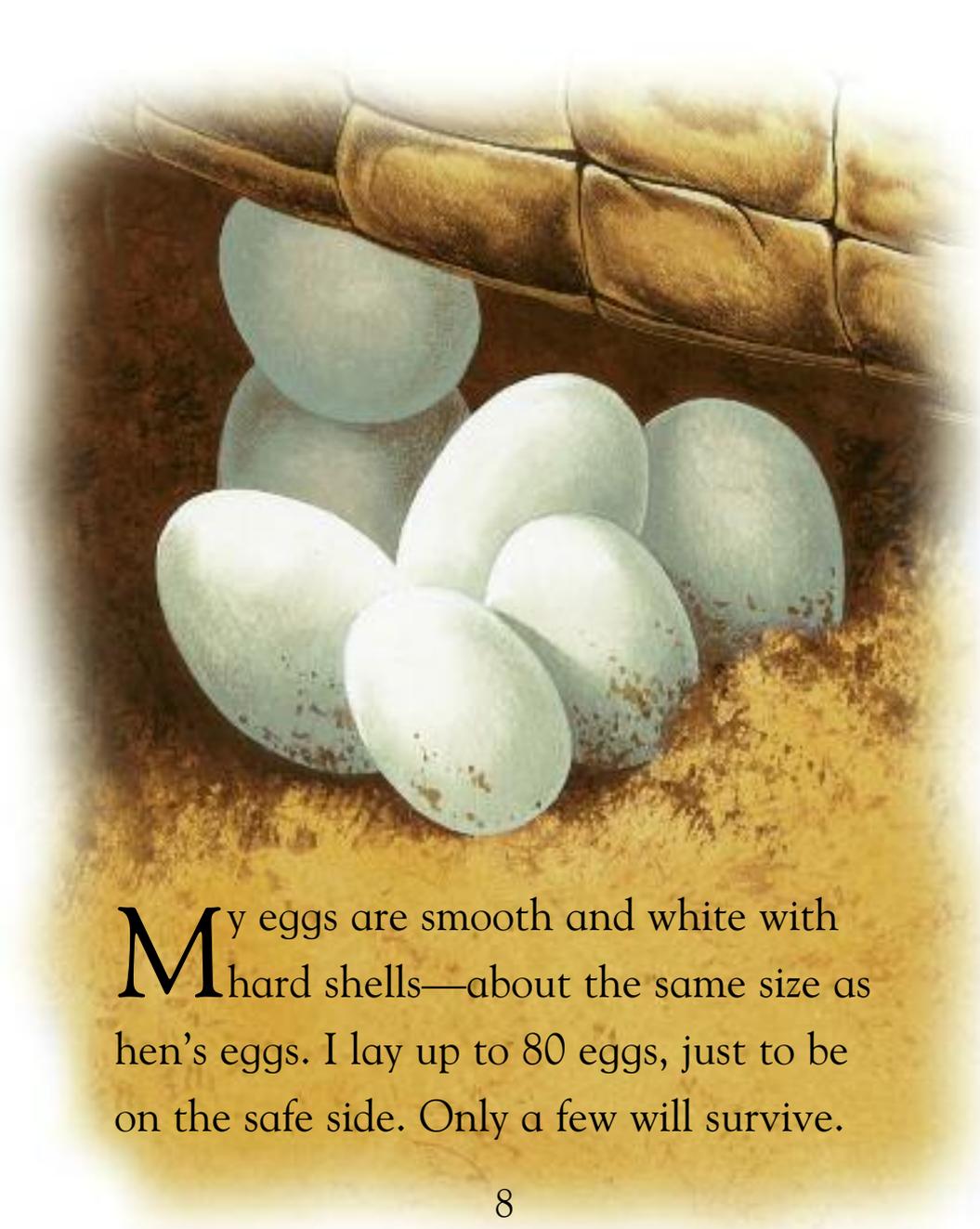
Reptiles

Crocodiles, lizards, snakes, turtles and tortoises ... we are all reptiles. Our skins are scaly and—unlike you warm-blooded humans—we are cold-blooded. Here you can read about our lives: how we capture our prey, how we look after our young (or don't), and many other strange things about us!

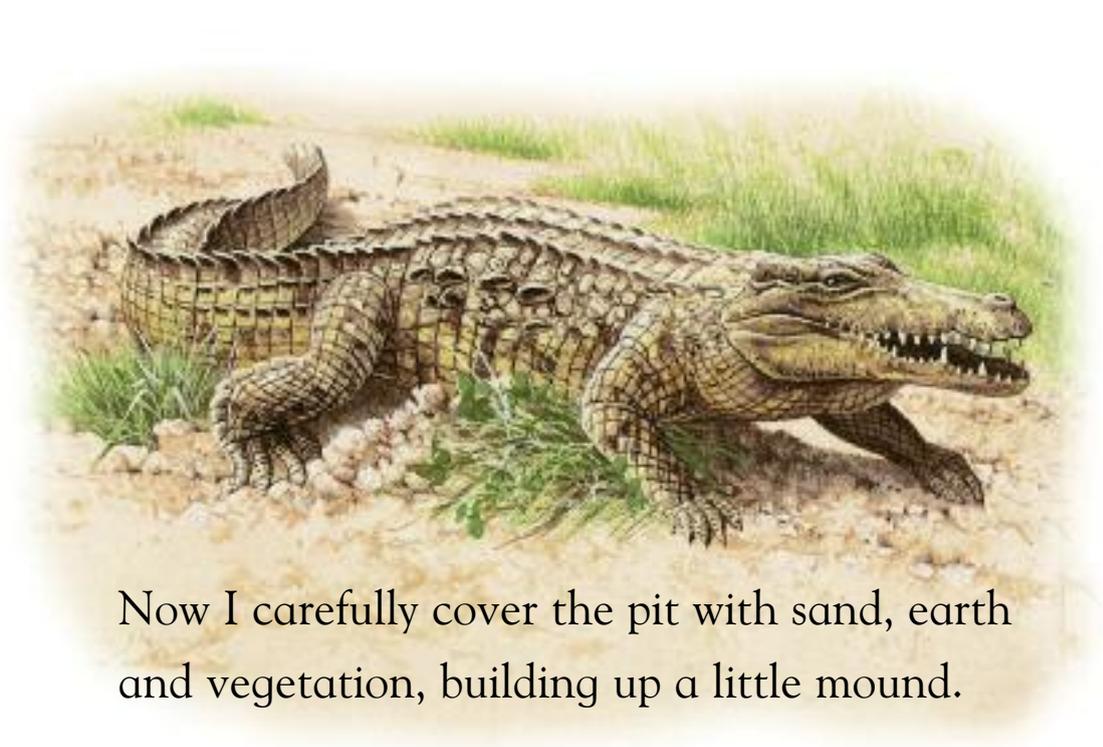
How does a crocodile raise its young?

I am a very caring mother. I make sure that other animals don't eat my eggs, and I keep my babies close to me for up to two months.

When it's time to lay my eggs, I go looking for a nice, sandy spot near the river. Then I dig out a hole with my strong front legs. This is going to be my nest. When it's finished I'll lay my eggs in it. Here they'll stay warm and dry.



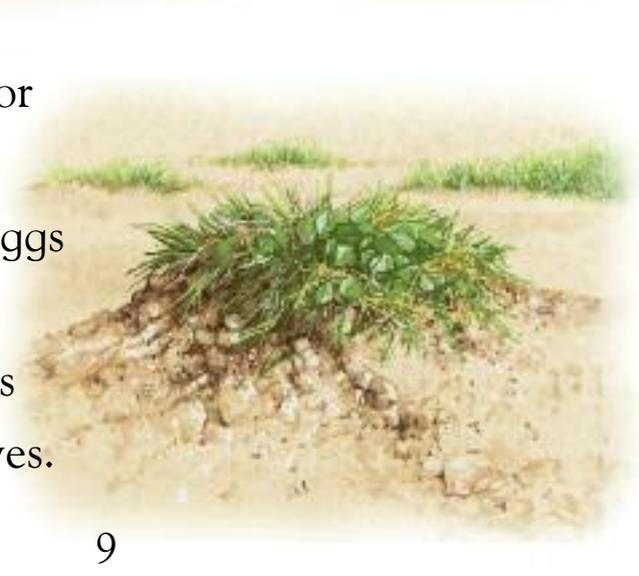
My eggs are smooth and white with hard shells—about the same size as hen’s eggs. I lay up to 80 eggs, just to be on the safe side. Only a few will survive.



Now I carefully cover the pit with sand, earth and vegetation, building up a little mound.

I guard the nest for three months.

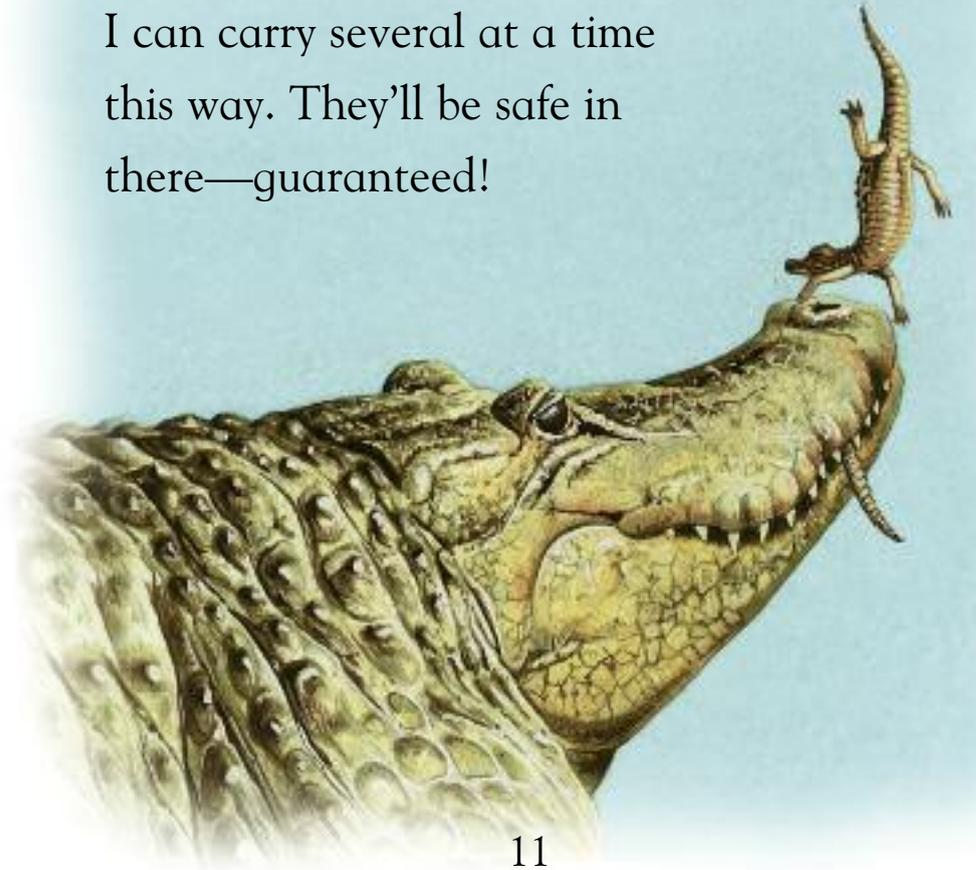
I don’t want my eggs being dug up by lizards, mongooses or other egg thieves.

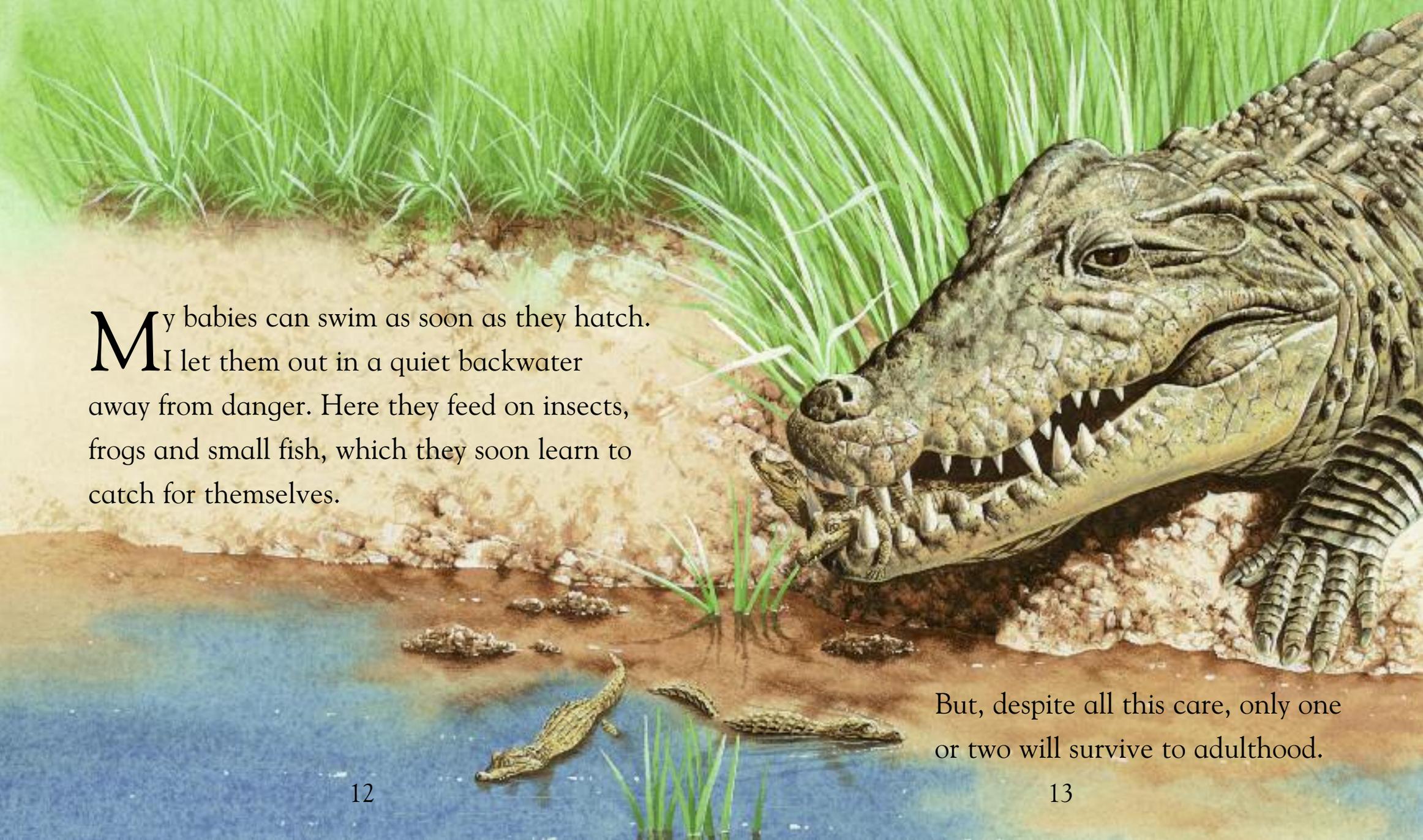




When my babies are ready to hatch out, they make high-pitched squeaks. That's a signal for me to start digging them out. They use a special tooth to break out of their shells.

If danger threatens, I carefully pick my babies up with my teeth, toss them in the air and catch them safely in my mouth. I can carry several at a time this way. They'll be safe in there—guaranteed!



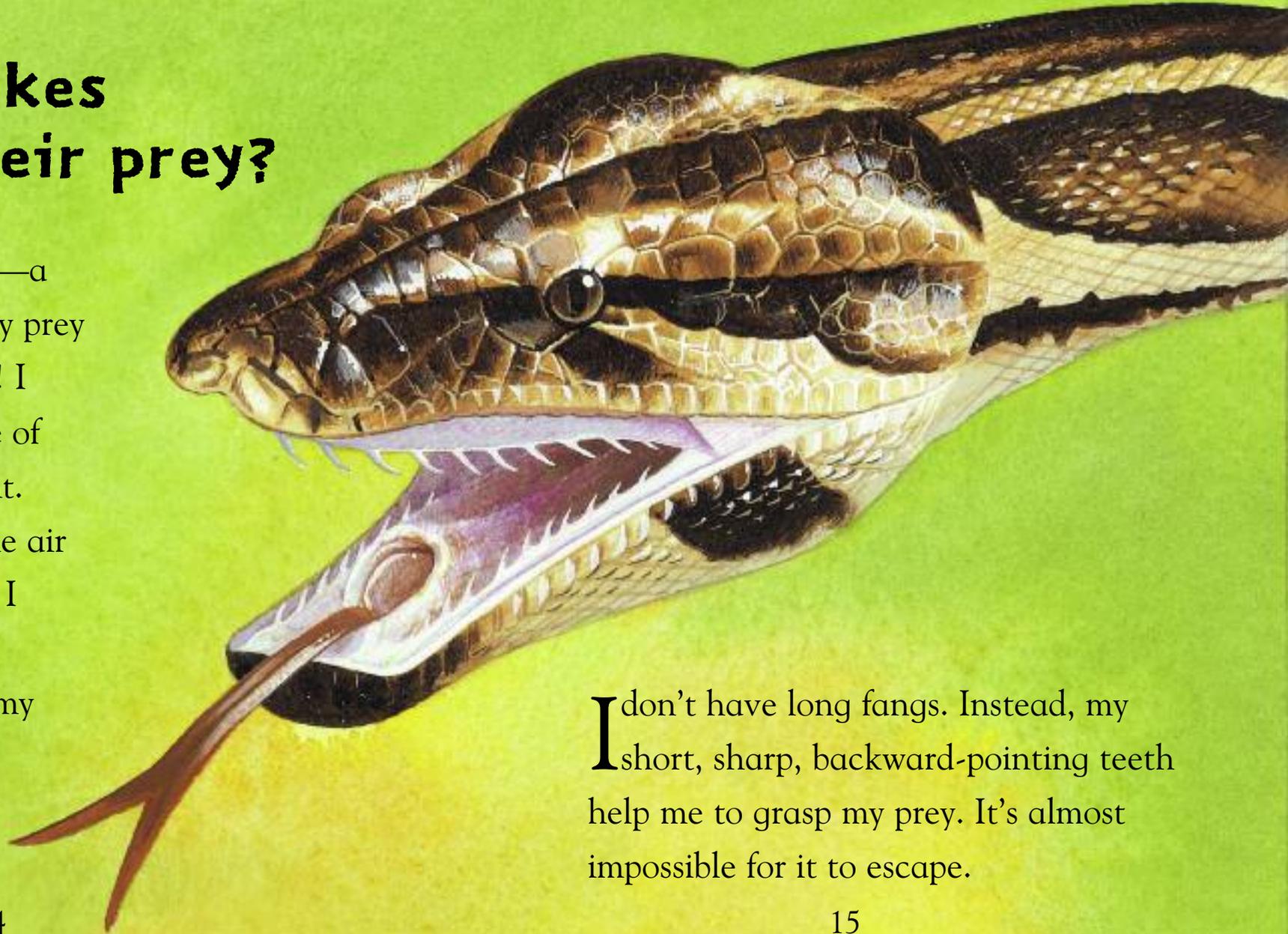


My babies can swim as soon as they hatch. I let them out in a quiet backwater away from danger. Here they feed on insects, frogs and small fish, which they soon learn to catch for themselves.

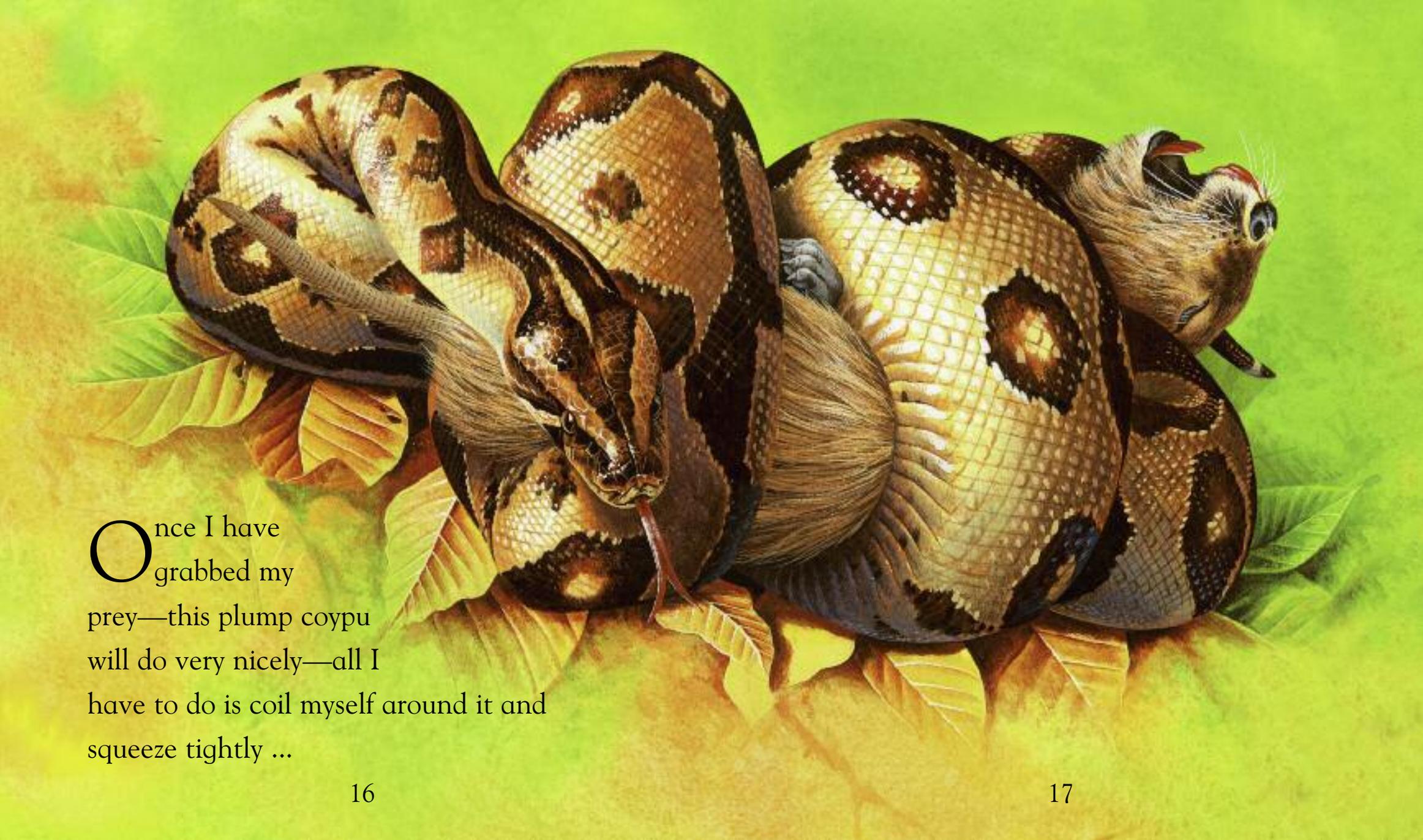
But, despite all this care, only one or two will survive to adulthood.

How do snakes capture their prey?

I am a boa constrictor—a dangerous hunter. My prey doesn't stand a chance! I have an excellent sense of smell and sharp eyesight. Catching its scent in the air with my forked tongue, I move silently and with lightning speed to coil my four-metre-long body around it and crush it to death.



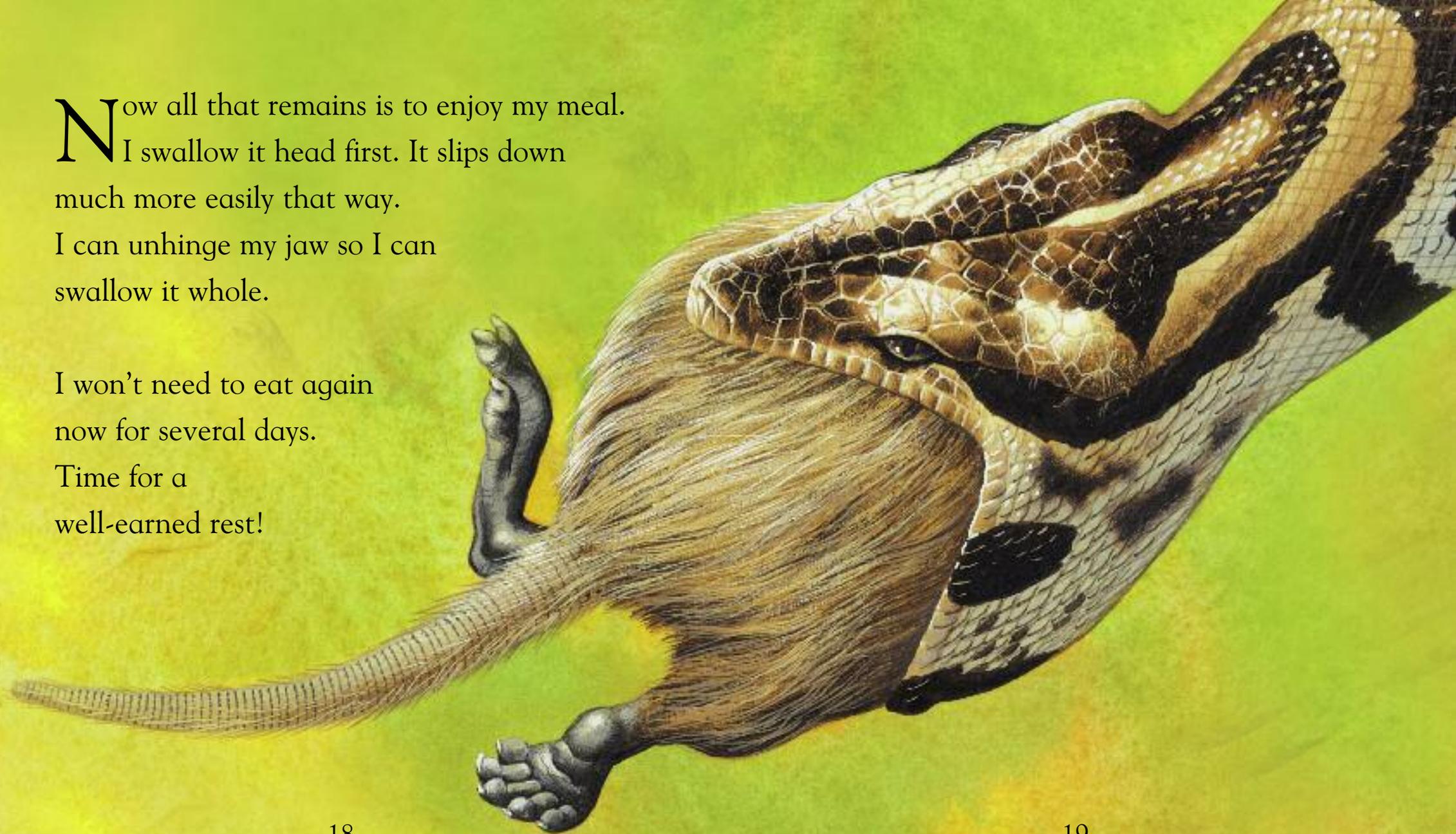
I don't have long fangs. Instead, my short, sharp, backward-pointing teeth help me to grasp my prey. It's almost impossible for it to escape.



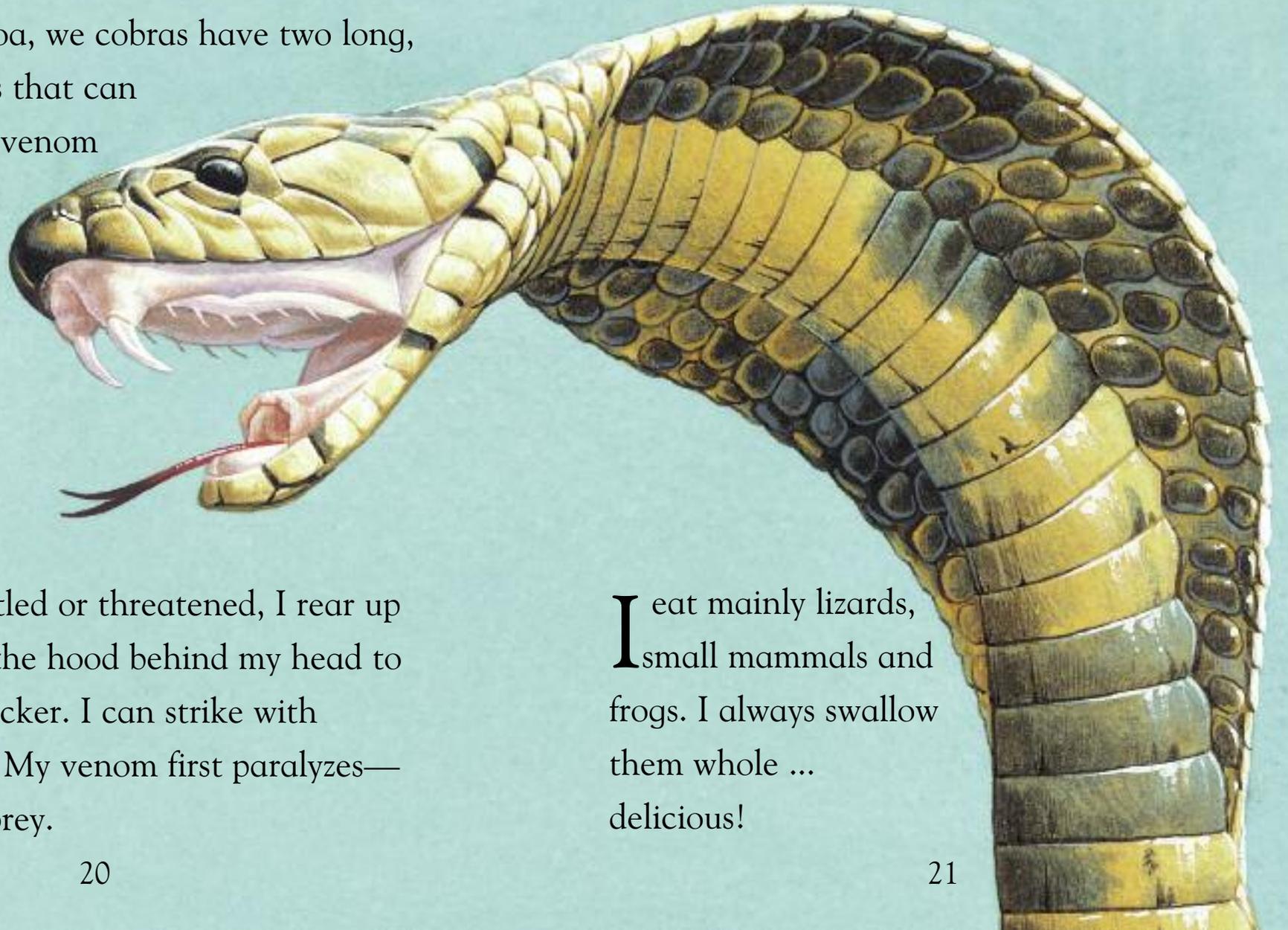
Once I have
grabbed my
prey—this plump coypu
will do very nicely—all I
have to do is coil myself around it and
squeeze tightly ...

Now all that remains is to enjoy my meal.
I swallow it head first. It slips down
much more easily that way.
I can unhinge my jaw so I can
swallow it whole.

I won't need to eat again
now for several days.
Time for a
well-earned rest!

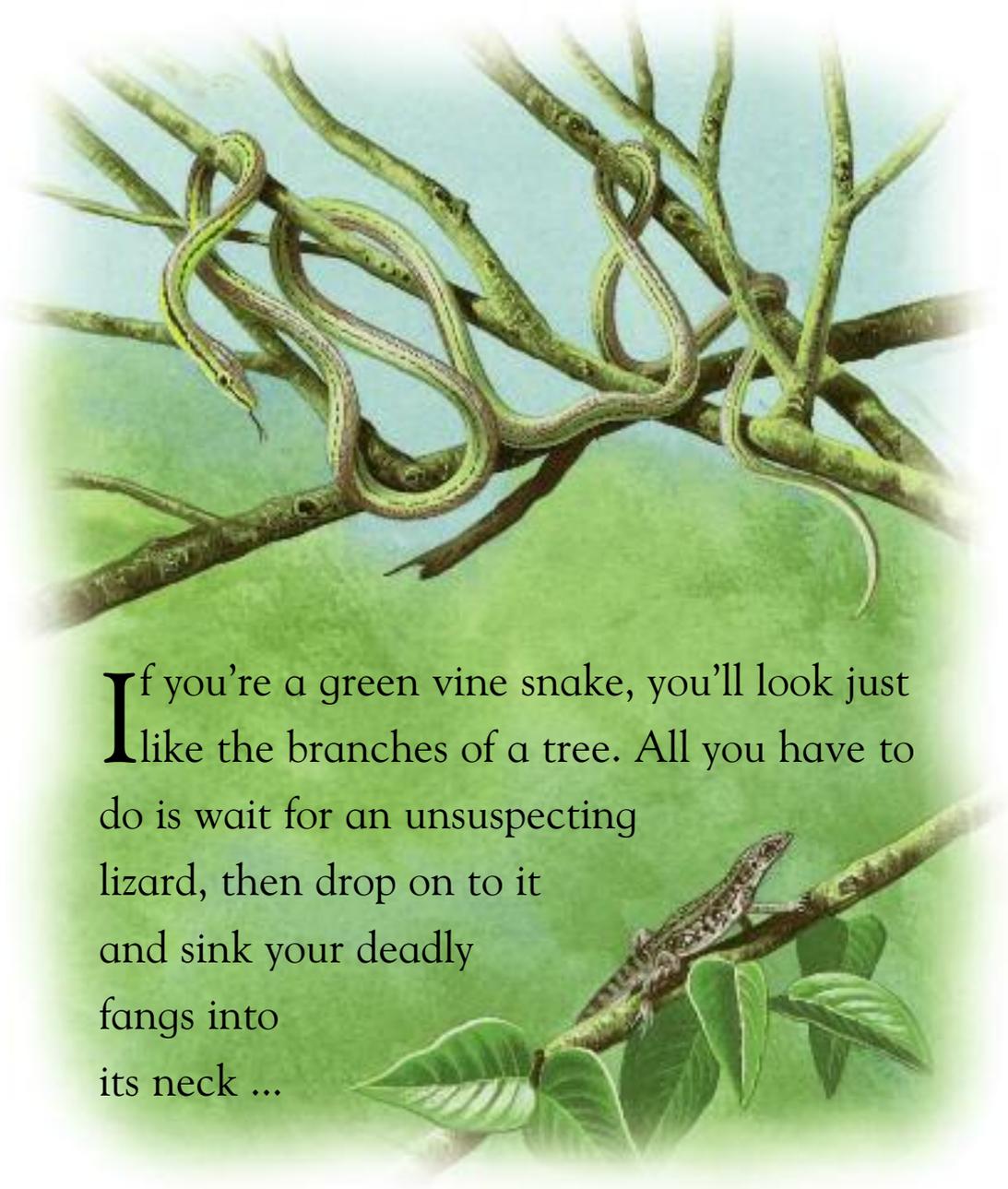


Unlike the boa, we cobras have two long, sharp fangs that can deliver a deadly venom to our prey.



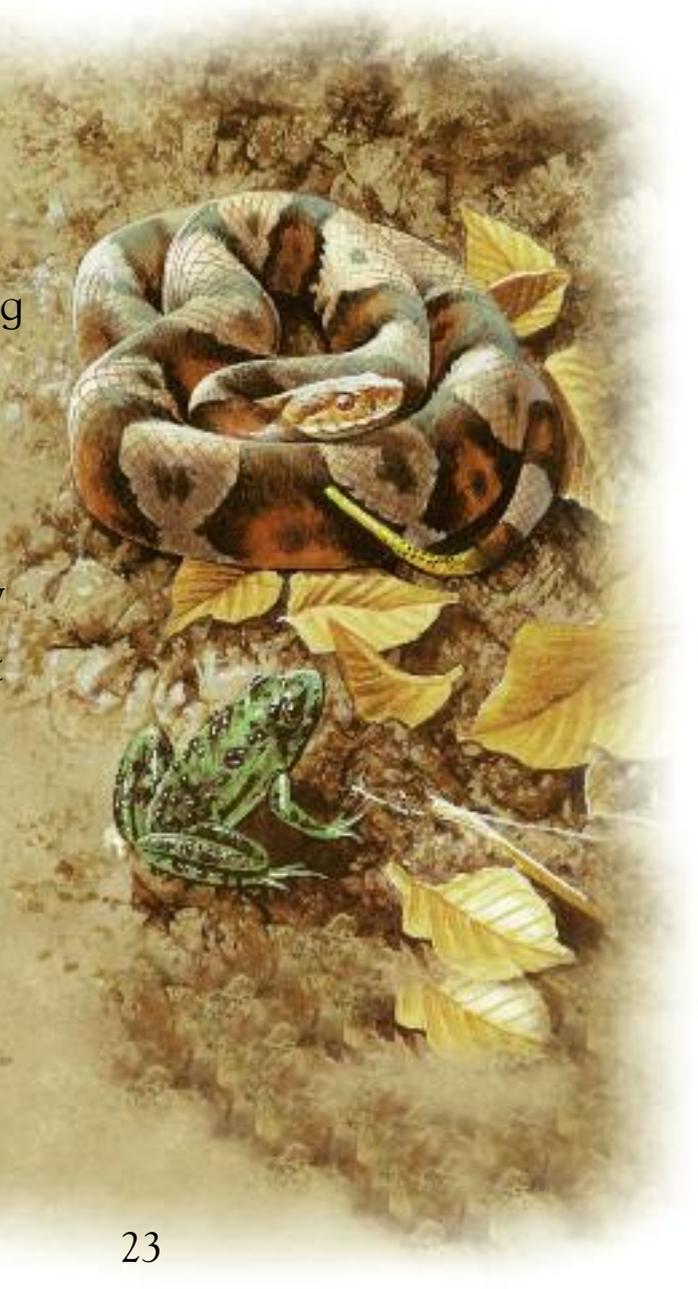
When I am startled or threatened, I rear up and spread out the hood behind my head to frighten my attacker. I can strike with lightning speed. My venom first paralyzes—then kills—my prey.

I eat mainly lizards, small mammals and frogs. I always swallow them whole ... delicious!



If you're a green vine snake, you'll look just like the branches of a tree. All you have to do is wait for an unsuspecting lizard, then drop on to it and sink your deadly fangs into its neck ...

Now I have a clever way of capturing my prey! I'm a copperhead pit viper. See that yellow tip to my tail? If I wave it front of, say, a frog, that hypnotizes it. Then I strike the poor, dazed thing with my fatal bite.

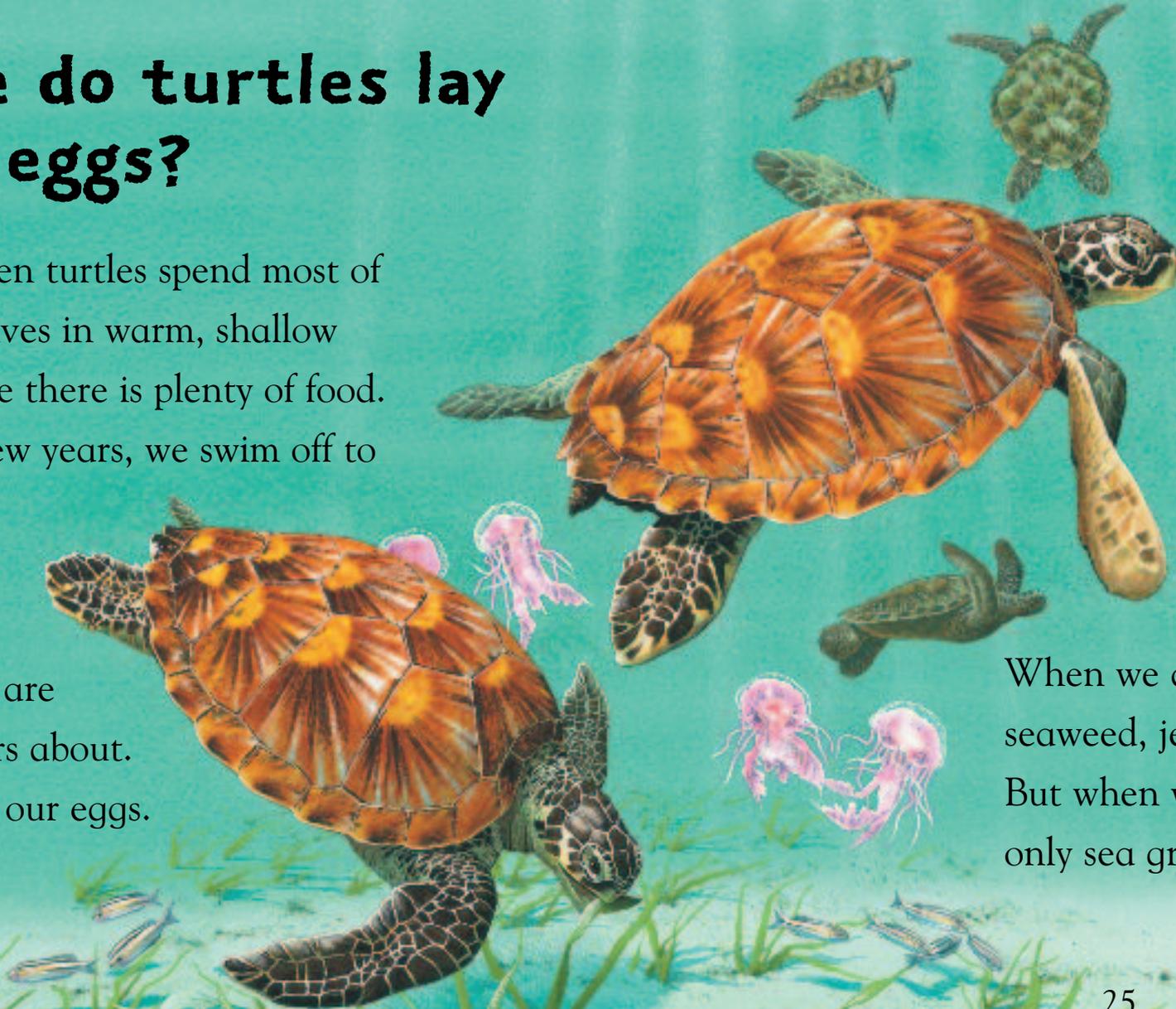


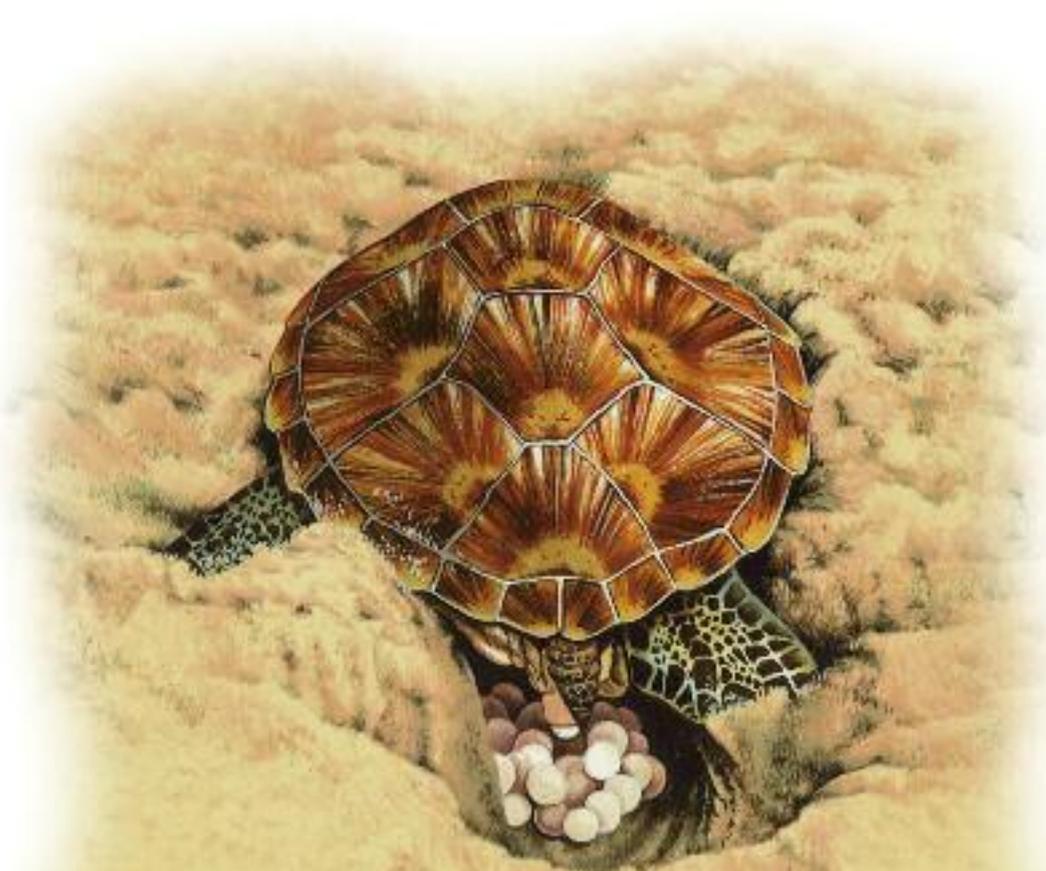
Where do turtles lay their eggs?

We green turtles spend most of our lives in warm, shallow waters where there is plenty of food. But, every few years, we swim off to find long, sandy beaches where there are few predators about. Here we lay our eggs.

With my strong front flippers, I'm a good swimmer. While I'm resting I can stay under the water for up to two hours.

When we are babies, we eat seaweed, jellyfish and shrimps. But when we grow up, we eat only sea grasses.





I come back to the same beach where I was born and haul myself ashore. I dig a pit in the sand and lay my eggs—about 100 of them—in it. Then I cover them over with sand and return to the sea.



In two or three months, my eggs hatch. After digging themselves out, the babies head for the sea. They usually do this at night, but many of them are picked off by gulls and crabs. Only one or two survive to become adults.

Why does a chameleon change colour?

I change colour to match my surroundings whenever I like. This helps to disguise me from my enemies—and my prey. When I spot something in the leaves, I turn green and creep up on it very carefully, fixing it with my swivelling eyes ...

Then my sticky tongue shoots out in a twinkling, fastens on to my insect victim, and reels it back into my mouth!

