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6 Church Green, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 4AW

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Created and produced by Julia Bruce, Rachel Coombs,
Nicholas Harris, Sarah Hartley, Katie Sexton and Erica Williams,
Orpheus Books Ltd.

Text by Olivia Brookes

Illustrated by Peter Scott (*The Art Agency*)
and Nicki Palin

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see how we live

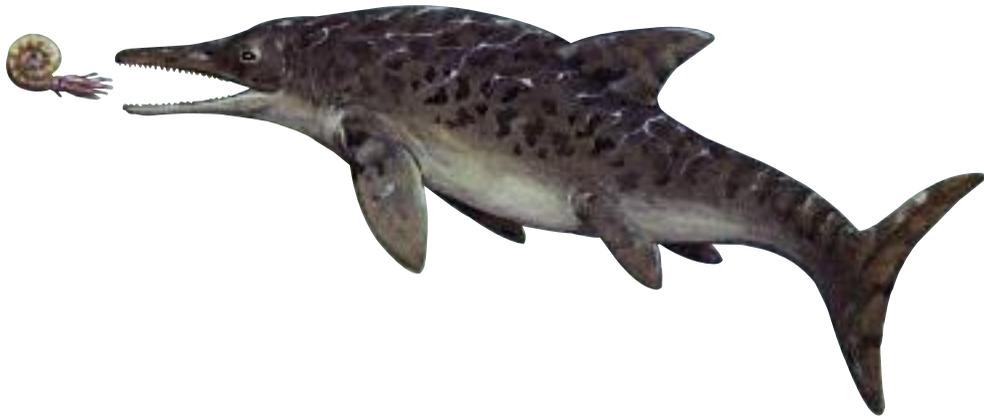
Prehistoric reptiles



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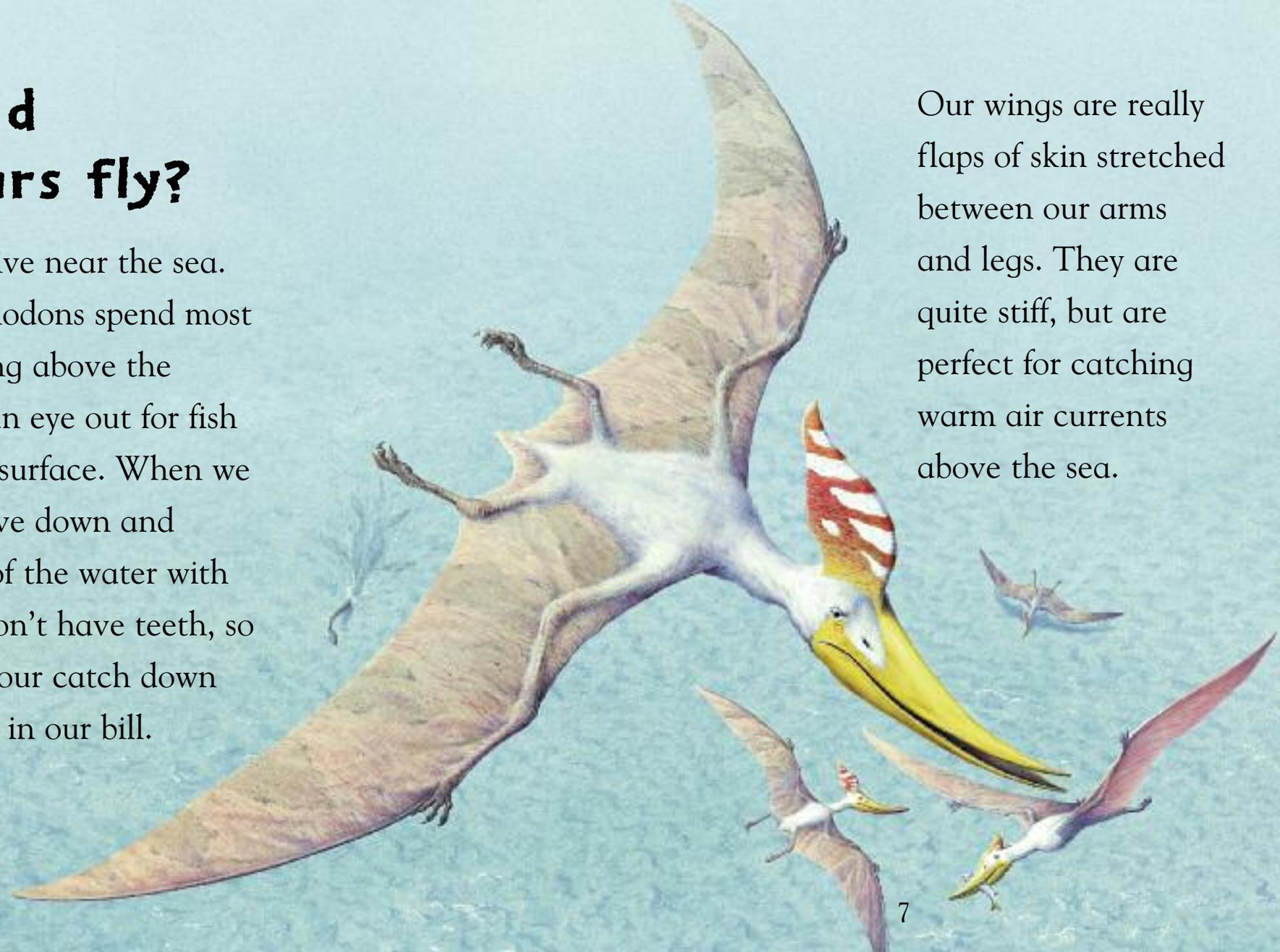
Pterosaurs and marine reptiles

We reptiles once ruled the Earth. Many millions of years before you humans first appeared, reptiles were kings of the land, seas and skies. Here you can find about about those of us who swooped in the air or swam in the oceans (definitely *not* dinosaurs).

Where did pterosaurs fly?

Many of us live near the sea. We Pteranodons spend most of our time gliding above the waves, keeping an eye out for fish near the water's surface. When we spot them, we dive down and scoop them out of the water with our beaks. We don't have teeth, so we have to gulp our catch down whole, or store it in our bill.

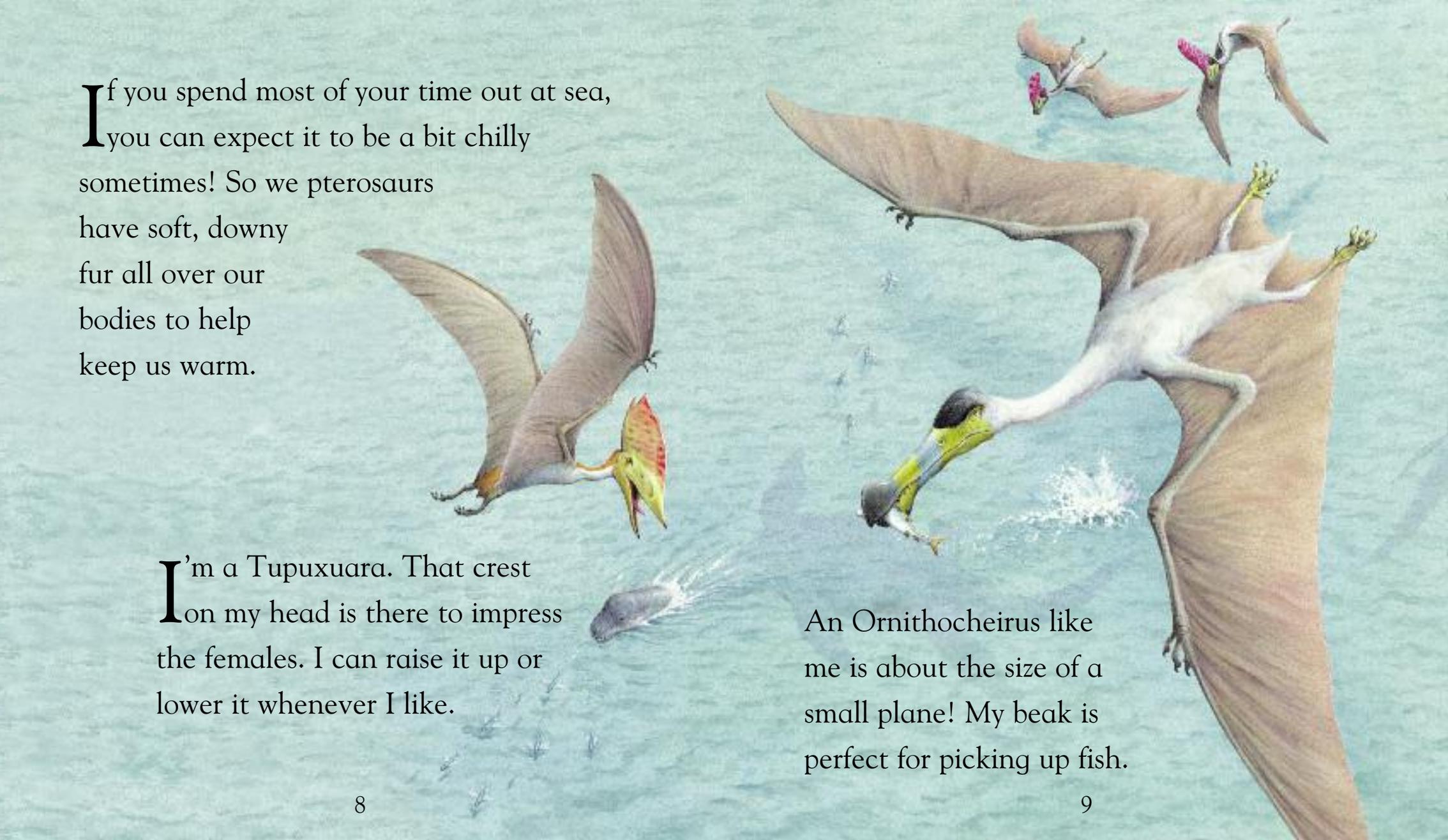
Our wings are really flaps of skin stretched between our arms and legs. They are quite stiff, but are perfect for catching warm air currents above the sea.



If you spend most of your time out at sea, you can expect it to be a bit chilly sometimes! So we pterosaurs have soft, downy fur all over our bodies to help keep us warm.

I'm a Tupuxuara. That crest on my head is there to impress the females. I can raise it up or lower it whenever I like.

An Ornithocheirus like me is about the size of a small plane! My beak is perfect for picking up fish.





I'm a Rhamphorhynchus. I was around a long time before Pteranodons. Unlike them, I do have teeth. They are long and forward-pointing, perfect for snatching fish out of rivers. I have a throat pouch to store my catch so I can take it back for my babies.

We are Eudimorphodons. We were some of the first pterosaurs of all. Like Rhamphorhynchus, we have long sharp teeth, but we also have small, jagged ones as well. Those diamond-shaped tips at the end of our long, stiff tails help us steer in the air. We flap our wings rather than use them for gliding.

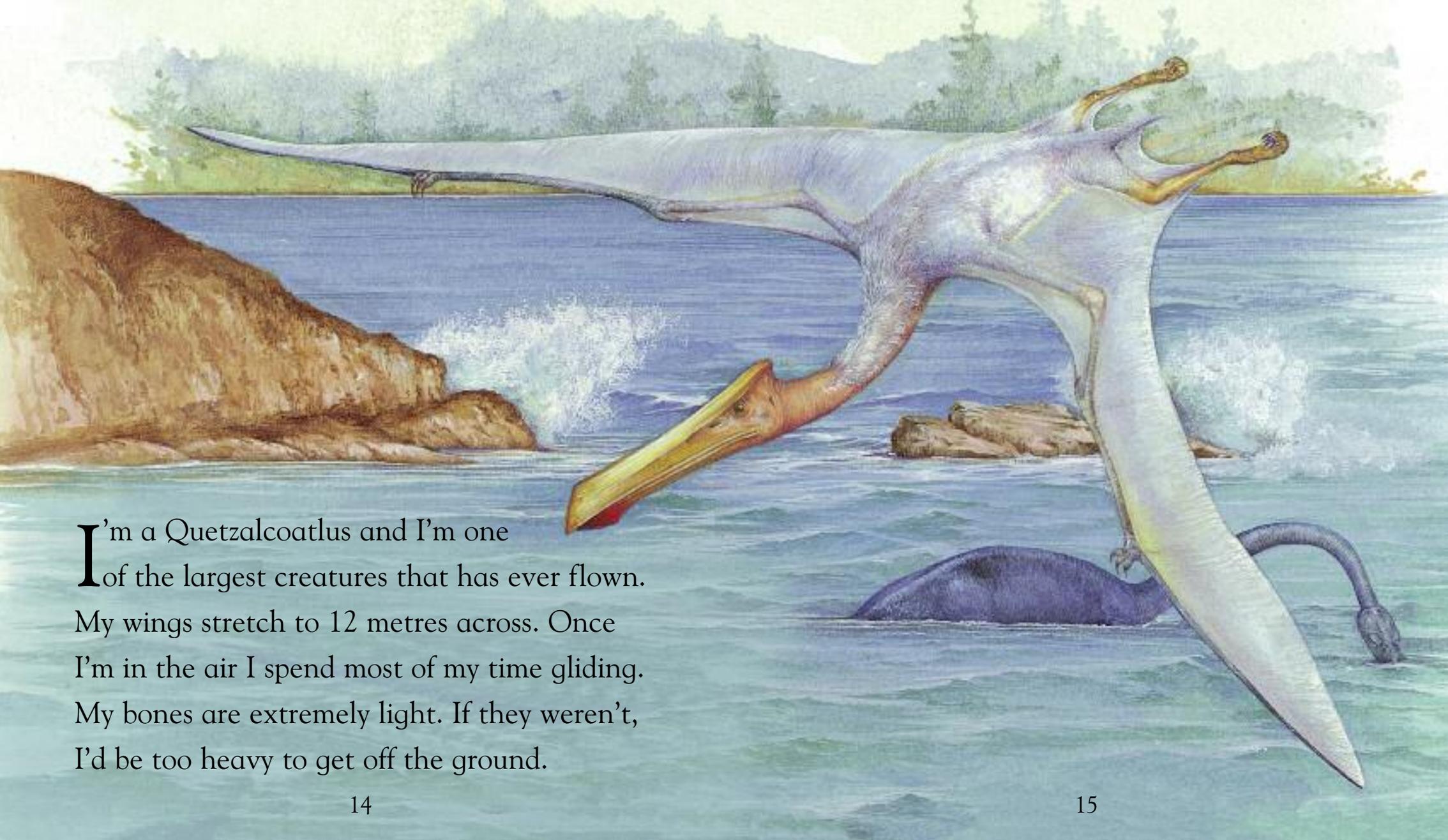




Our bills come in all shapes and sizes. I'm a Dimorphodon and I look a bit like a puffin. My strong jaws are good for cracking open shellfish. Dsungaripterus uses its upturned bill to chip shellfish off the rocks.



Now I'm a very odd-looking one! I have hundreds of brush-like bristles lining my long jaws. Tiny sea creatures get trapped in my bristles as I fly over the water with my beak open wide like a basket. My real name is Pterodaustro but I'm often called "flamingo pterosaur". That's because my way of feeding is quite similar to that of a flamingo.



I'm a Quetzalcoatlus and I'm one of the largest creatures that has ever flown. My wings stretch to 12 metres across. Once I'm in the air I spend most of my time gliding. My bones are extremely light. If they weren't, I'd be too heavy to get off the ground.



What did the first bird look like?

Pterosaurs weren't the only flying creatures around in the Age of Dinosaurs. Did you know we birds first took to the air at this time? In fact, the dinosaurs were our ancestors.

Quite a few dinosaurs had feathers. Some tiny ones would go running and jumping after insects. It was only a short step to taking to the air! I'm Archaeopteryx, one of the first birds. I still have teeth, claws and a long, dinosaur-like tail. Confuciosornis still has claws, but has a fancy, two-pronged tail.



Which reptiles lived under the sea?

While dinosaurs ruled the land and pterosaurs flew in the skies, other reptiles swam in the oceans. The three main kinds were plesiosaurs, pliosaurs and ichthyosaurs.

We are ichthyosaurs, a name that means “fish lizards”. We have a fish-like shape with fins and a fishy tail.

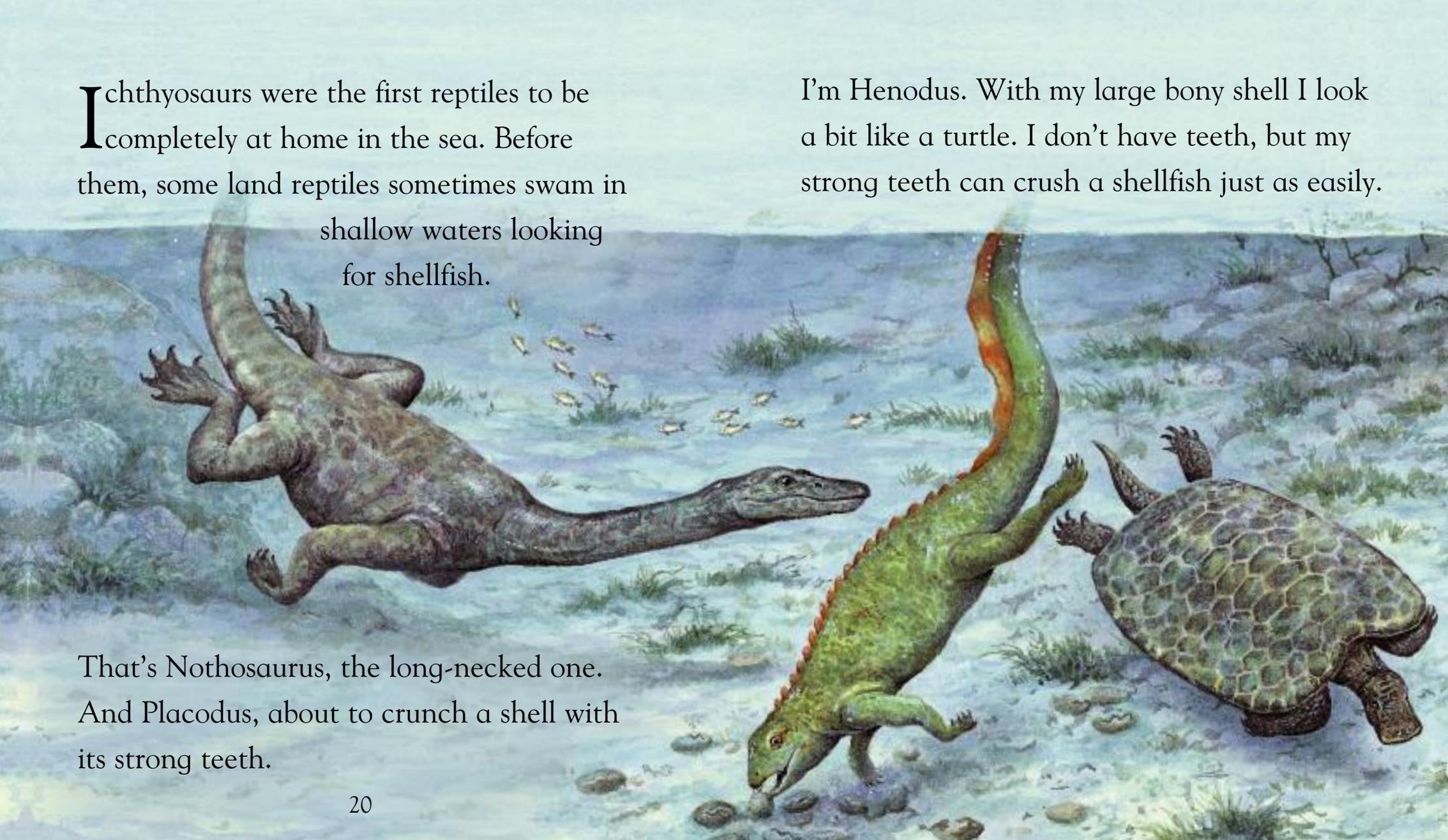


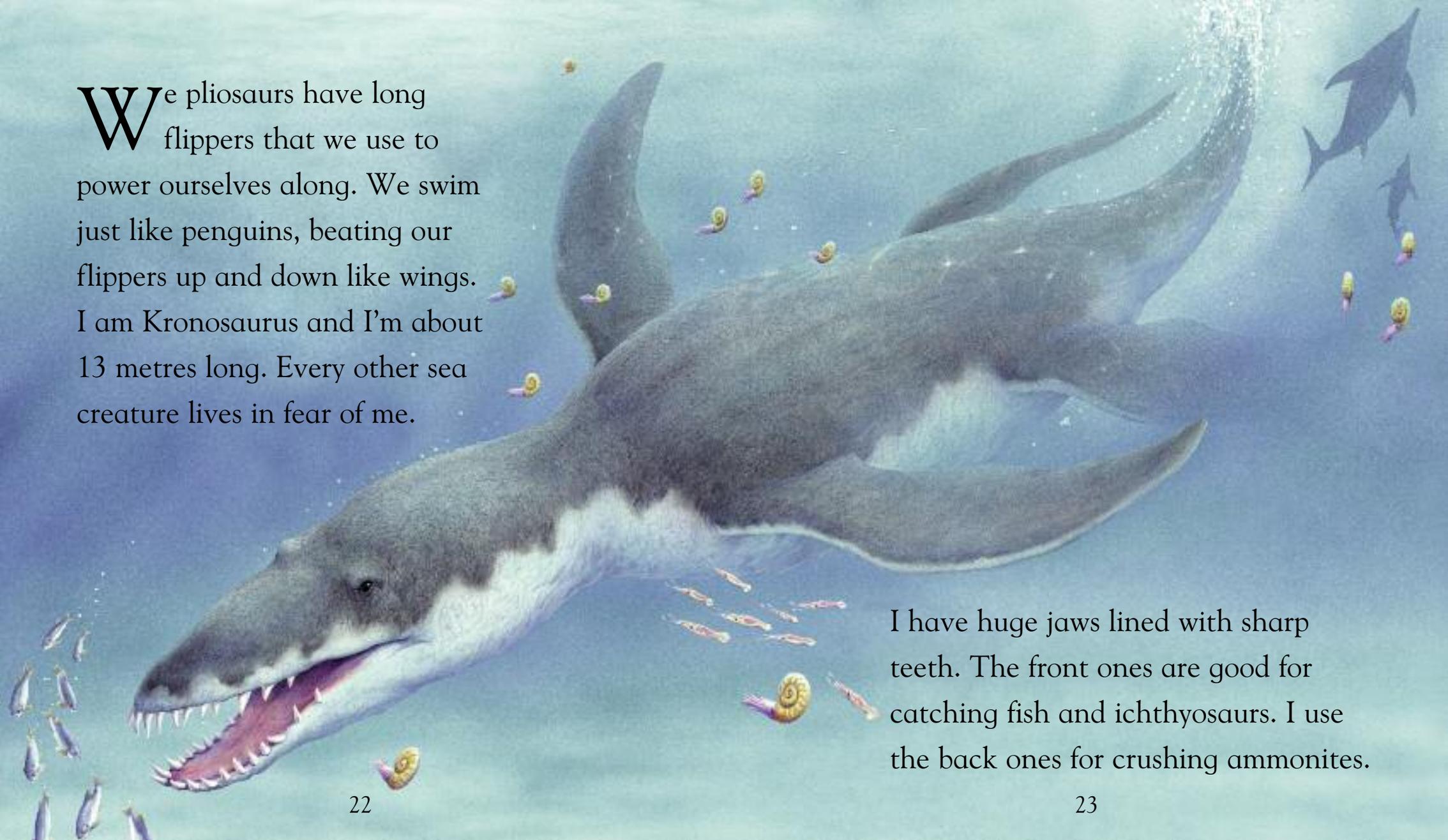
We use our tail to power through the water at speed. We eat fish and ammonites, which are like squid in coiled shells.

Ichthyosaurs were the first reptiles to be completely at home in the sea. Before them, some land reptiles sometimes swam in shallow waters looking for shellfish.

I'm Henodus. With my large bony shell I look a bit like a turtle. I don't have teeth, but my strong teeth can crush a shellfish just as easily.

That's Nothosaurus, the long-necked one. And Placodus, about to crunch a shell with its strong teeth.

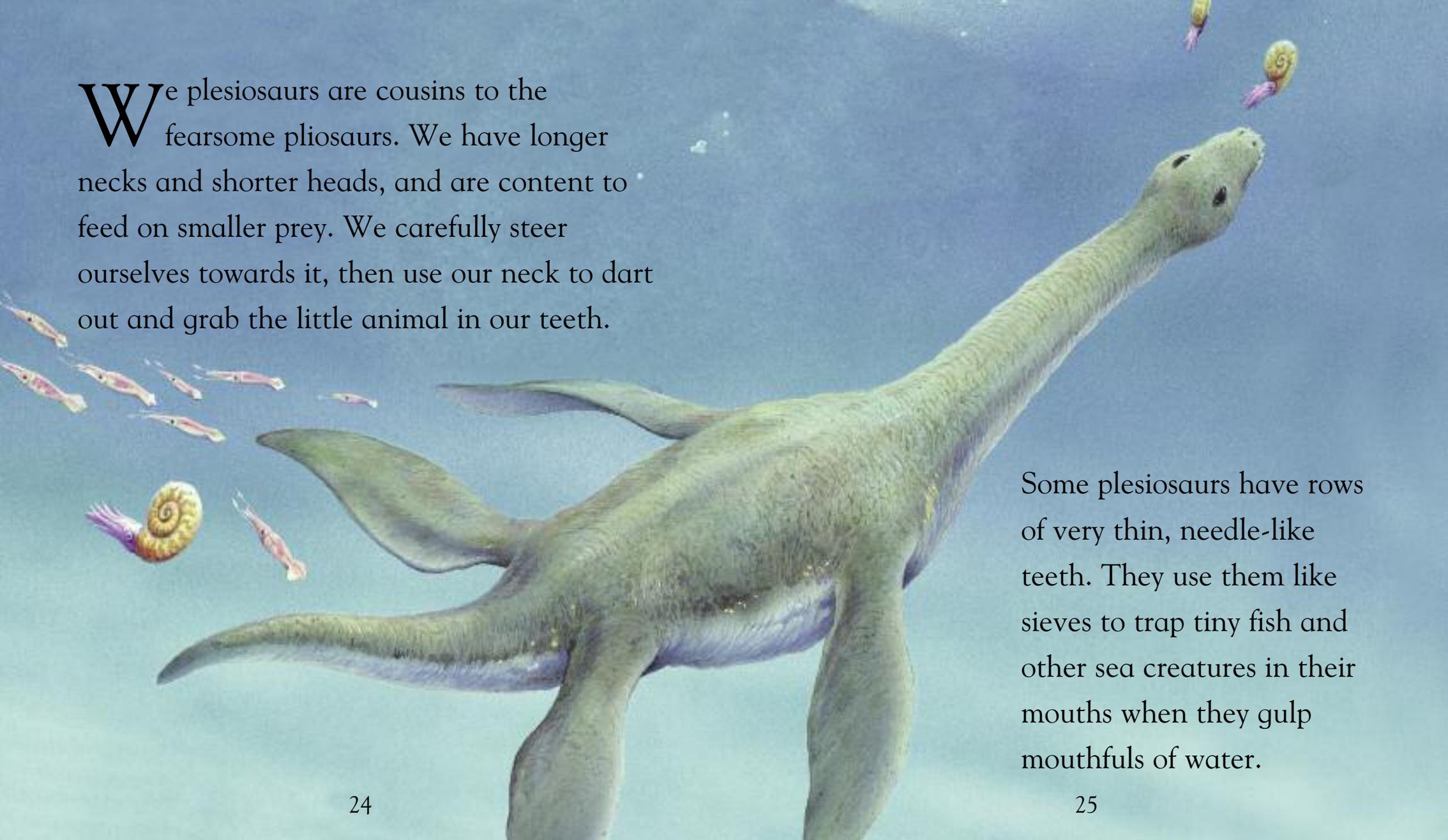




We pliosaurs have long flippers that we use to power ourselves along. We swim just like penguins, beating our flippers up and down like wings. I am Kronosaurus and I'm about 13 metres long. Every other sea creature lives in fear of me.

I have huge jaws lined with sharp teeth. The front ones are good for catching fish and ichthyosaurs. I use the back ones for crushing ammonites.

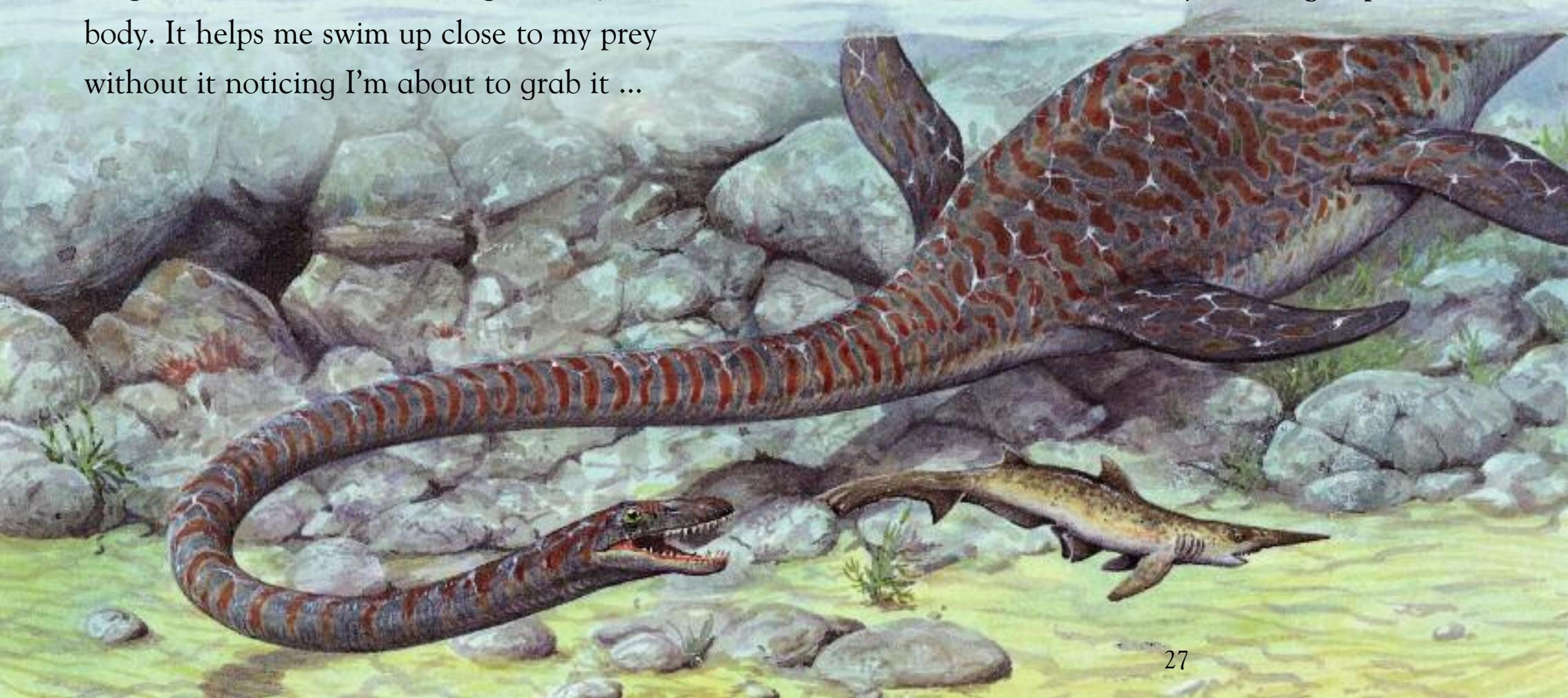
We plesiosaurs are cousins to the fearsome pliosaurs. We have longer necks and shorter heads, and are content to feed on smaller prey. We carefully steer ourselves towards it, then use our neck to dart out and grab the little animal in our teeth.



Some plesiosaurs have rows of very thin, needle-like teeth. They use them like sieves to trap tiny fish and other sea creatures in their mouths when they gulp mouthfuls of water.

An Elasmosaurus like me is another kind of plesiosaur. But my neck is extremely long—more than half the length of my entire body. It helps me swim up close to my prey without it noticing I'm about to grab it ...

Sometimes I paddle along at the surface with my neck right out of the water. I can see shoals of fish more easily from high up.



What happened to the marine reptiles?

Like the dinosaurs and pterosaurs, all marine reptiles died out at the end of the Cretaceous Period, 65 million years ago.

No one knows for sure why this happened. Probably a meteorite crashed to Earth, causing an explosion that changed the world's climate for a while.

You can find the remains of marine reptiles in the rocks. This is a fossil of me, an ichthyosaur. When I died, I was covered over by mud on the sea bed.

Over millions of years, the mud (and my bones) gradually turned to rock.

