

My First Library of Knowledge

Mini-Beasts



 Orpheus

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Created and produced by Rachel Coombs,
Nicholas Harris and Sarah Hartley,
Orpheus Books Ltd.

Text Rachel Coombs and Nicholas Harris

Consultant Richard Walker

Illustrated by Fiammetta Dogi, Betti Ferrero,
Sauro Giampaio, Ray Grinaway,
Inklink Firenze, David Wright

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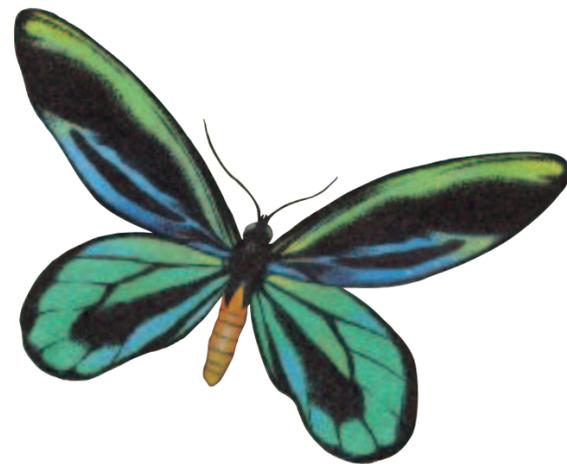
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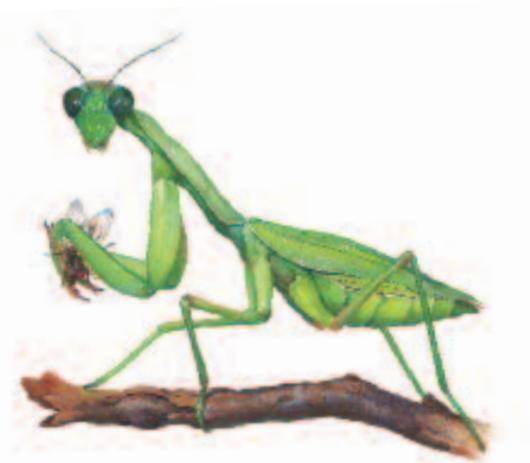
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INTRODUCTION

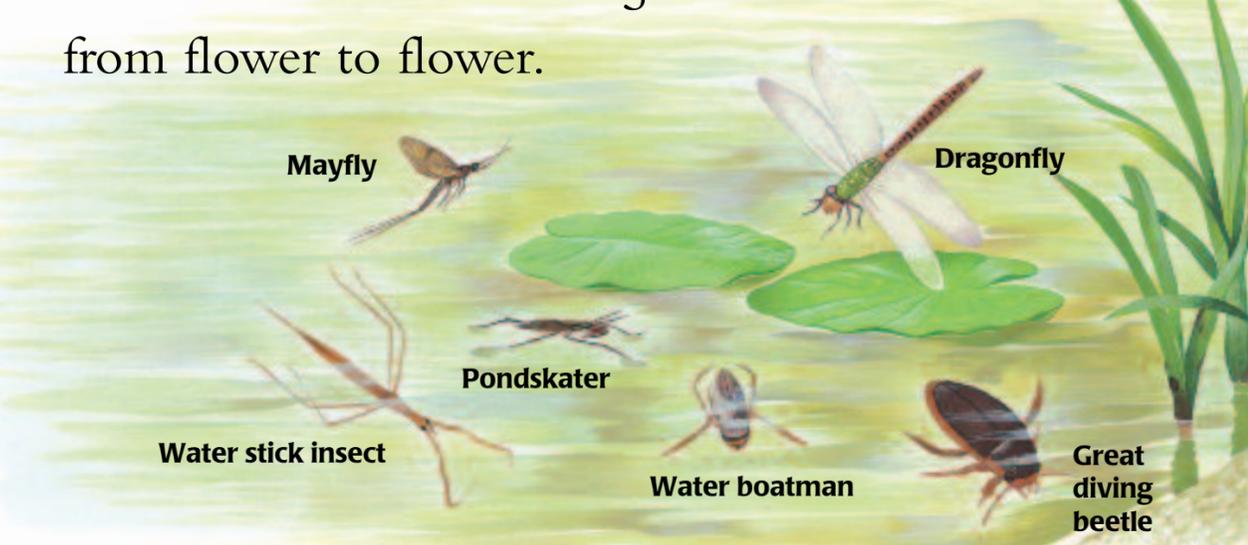
BESIDES mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, there are other kinds of animals that live on land. They are mostly very small. Some live in the soil, while others can fly. Still others live in our homes, and some even live on us! These are the amazing creatures we call mini-beasts—insects, spiders, worms and many others.



THE WORLD OF MINI-BEASTS

THERE ARE mini-beasts all around us. In just a small area of ground, you may, on a summer's day, come across bees and butterflies flitting from flower to flower.

Beetles, centipedes and spiders scuttle around on the ground, while the soil is full of ants, worms and other small creatures.



MICRO-BEASTS

The top part of the soil may be teeming with millions of mini-beasts. Most are far too tiny for us to see without a microscope. Micro-beasts like soil mites and springtails (*right*) all play their part in turning rotting animal and plant matter into nutrients that make the soil more fertile for plants.

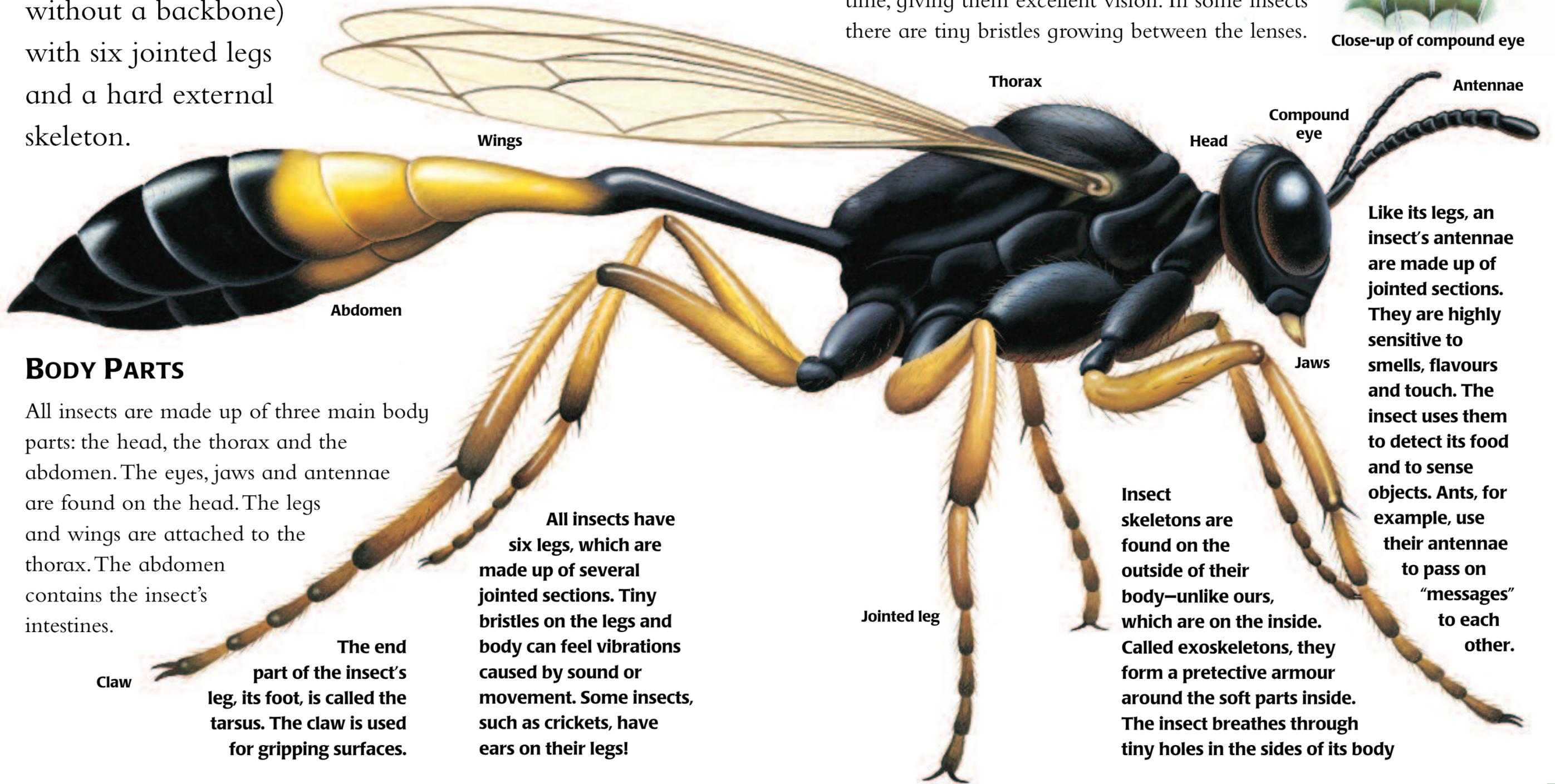


Earthworms burrow through the earth. Their tunnels allow air to get to plant roots. Worms also mix up the soil, bringing rotting matter down from the surface. This makes the soil better for growing plants. Slugs and snails often hide in damp dark places in order to stay moist.

WHAT IS AN INSECT?

AN INSECT is an invertebrate (an animal without a backbone) with six jointed legs and a hard external skeleton.

Although it is only 2 mm long, this parasitic wasp has all the features of a typical insect.



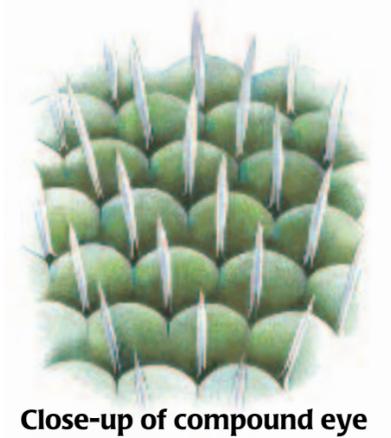
BODY PARTS

All insects are made up of three main body parts: the head, the thorax and the abdomen. The eyes, jaws and antennae are found on the head. The legs and wings are attached to the thorax. The abdomen contains the insect's intestines.

The end part of the insect's leg, its foot, is called the tarsus. The claw is used for gripping surfaces.

All insects have six legs, which are made up of several jointed sections. Tiny bristles on the legs and body can feel vibrations caused by sound or movement. Some insects, such as crickets, have ears on their legs!

Insect skeletons are found on the outside of their body—unlike ours, which are on the inside. Called exoskeletons, they form a protective armour around the soft parts inside. The insect breathes through tiny holes in the sides of its body



Close-up of compound eye

COMPOUND EYES

Most insects have compound eyes. They are made up from hundreds of lenses. These allow the insect to see ahead, below and behind all at the same time, giving them excellent vision. In some insects there are tiny bristles growing between the lenses.

Like its legs, an insect's antennae are made up of jointed sections. They are highly sensitive to smells, flavours and touch. The insect uses them to detect its food and to sense objects. Ants, for example, use their antennae to pass on "messages" to each other.

CAMOUFLAGE AND MARKINGS

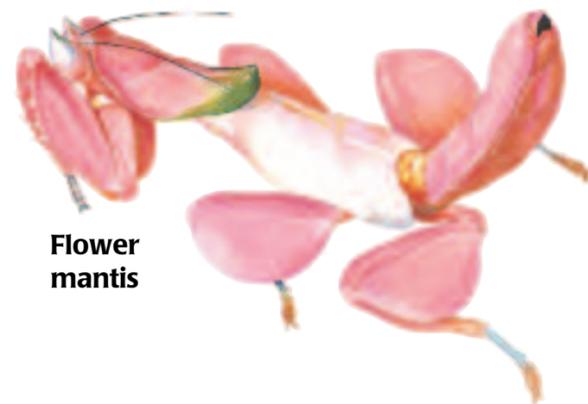
INSECTS use camouflage and markings to hide themselves from prey. Stick insects, for example, take on the same colour and shape as the plants they live amongst. They even sway in the breeze along with the plant.



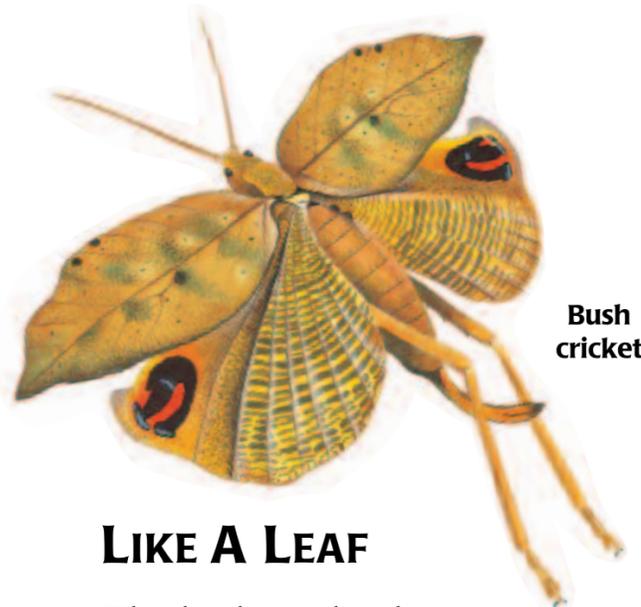
Stick insect

DEADLY FLOWER

This flower mantis, found in Africa and the Far East, blends in among pink orchids. It waits very still for an insect to come to collect nectar before launching its attack.



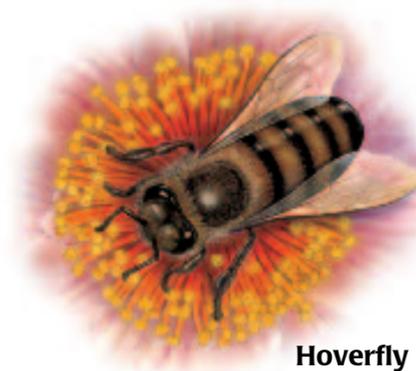
Flower mantis



Bush cricket

LIKE A LEAF

The bush cricket lives in trees. When still, it looks like a dead leaf, so other creatures do not notice it. When disturbed, it leaps to safety, flashing its fake eyes.



Hoverfly

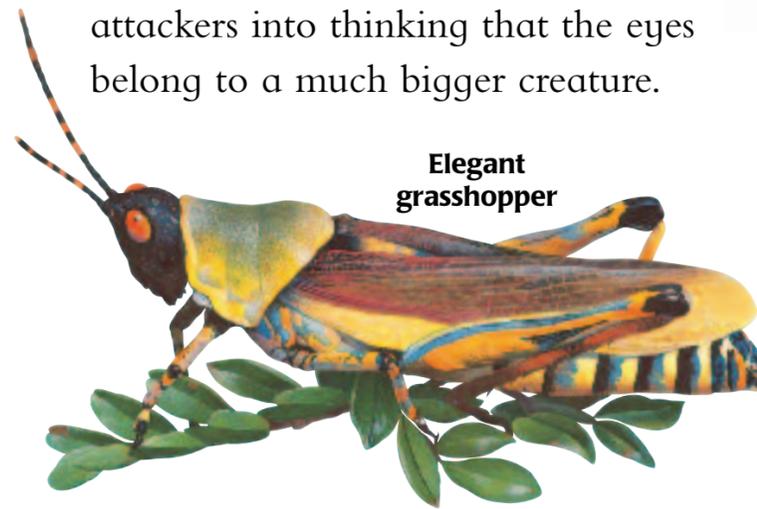
This hoverfly's markings make it look like a bee. This scares off hungry birds.

BUTTERFLY EYES

Many butterflies, like this purple emperor butterfly, have markings on their wings that look like eyes. These are usually hidden and only revealed when their wings open. They fool attackers into thinking that the eyes belong to a much bigger creature.



Purple emperor butterfly



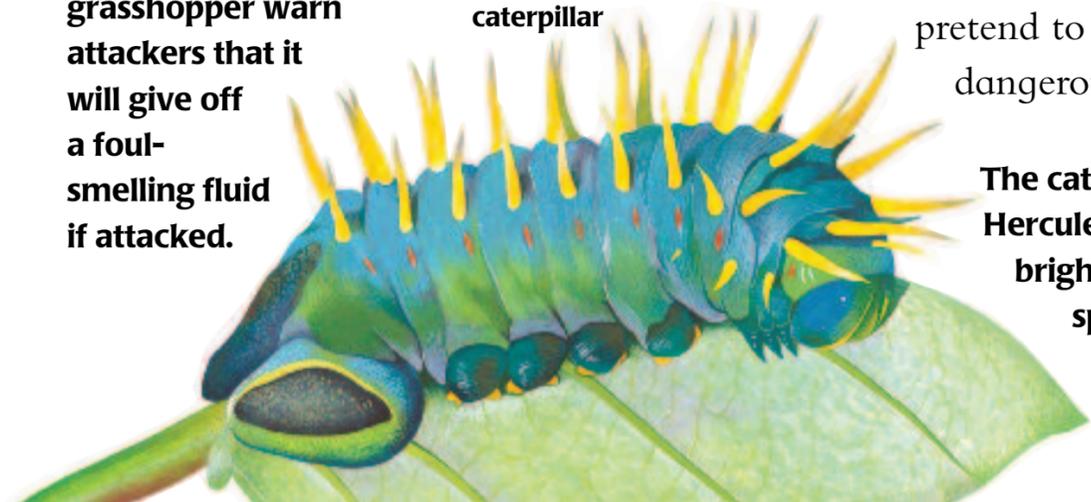
Elegant grasshopper

The colours of this grasshopper warn attackers that it will give off a foul-smelling fluid if attacked.

COLOUR

Some insects make no attempt to blend into the background. Instead they have bright colours. These mean: danger! Reds, yellows and blacks warn predators that they sting or are poisonous. Some harmless insects use these colours to pretend to be dangerous.

Hercules moth caterpillar

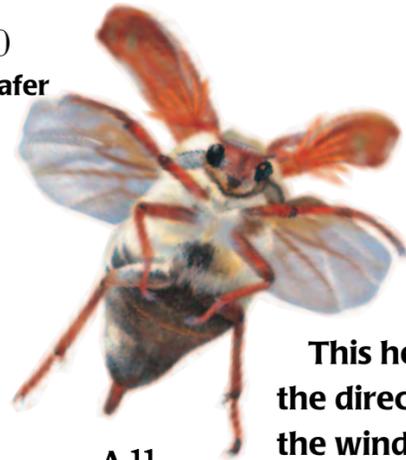


The caterpillar of the Hercules moth has brightly coloured spikes to warn off predators.

BETLES

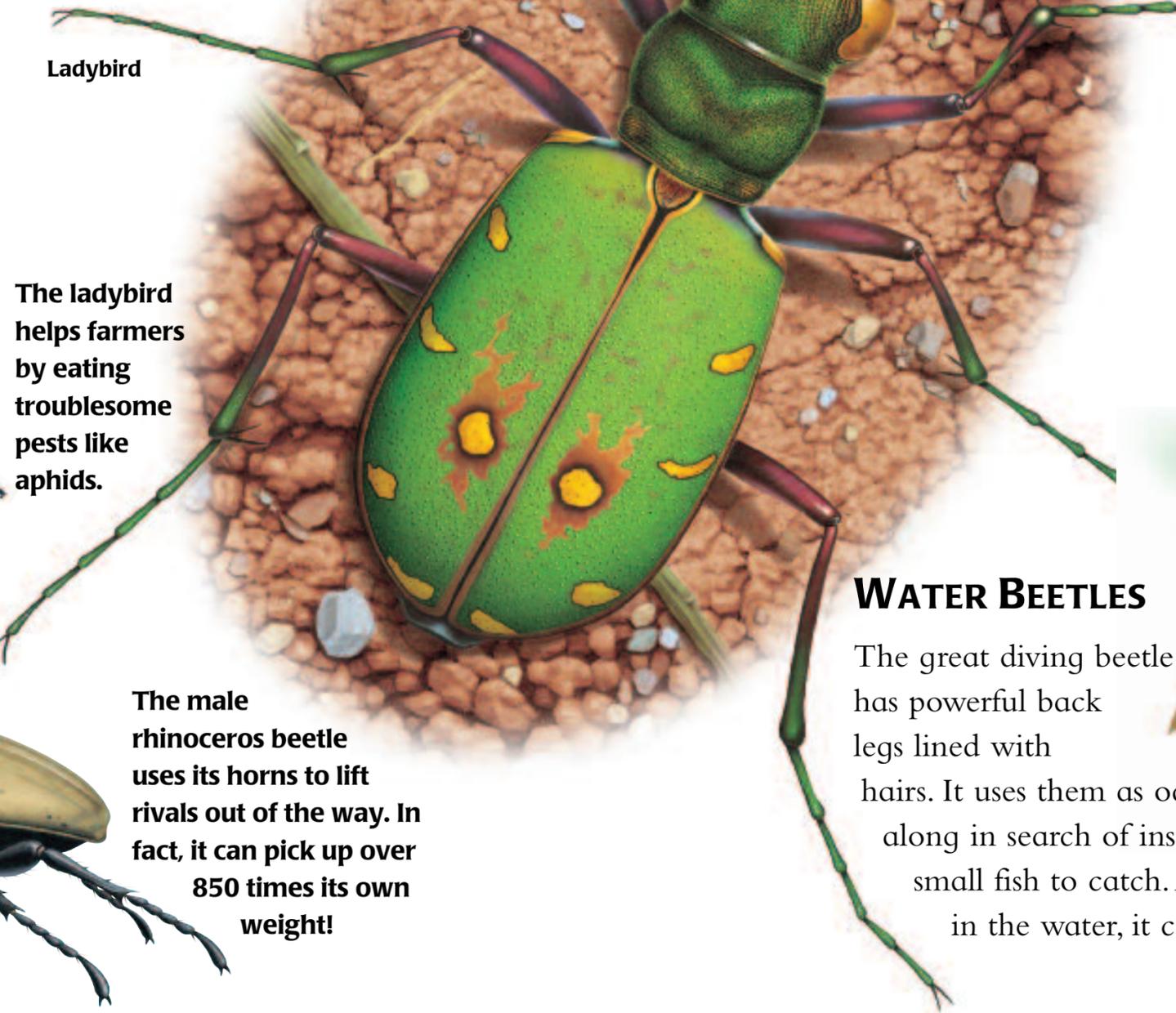
BEETLES make up the largest group of insects. There is a huge variety in colours and shapes. All beetles have wings. When they are not in flight, the wings are folded away under hard wing-cases for protection.

10
Cockchafer



The cockchafer spreads its antennae when it flies. This helps it sense the direction of the wind.

Ladybird

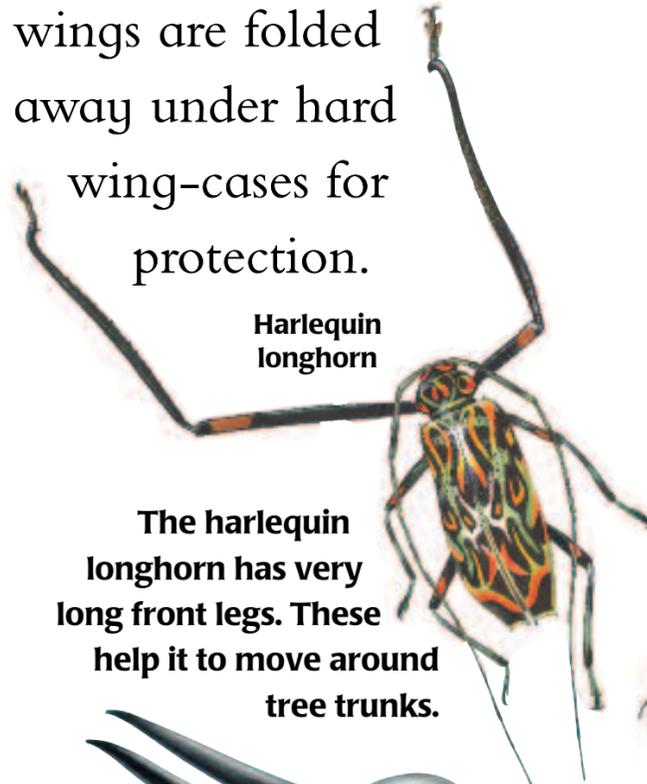


Like its namesake, the tiger beetle is a ferocious predator. It is one of the fastest insects on the ground.

Tiger beetle

The ladybird helps farmers by eating troublesome pests like aphids.

Harlequin longhorn



The harlequin longhorn has very long front legs. These help it to move around tree trunks.

Rhinoceros beetle



The male rhinoceros beetle uses its horns to lift rivals out of the way. In fact, it can pick up over 850 times its own weight!

Dung beetle



DUNG BEETLES

Dung beetles live in grasslands. The adult beetles use their toothed legs to mould the dung into balls. Then they roll the ball to their under-ground burrows. They lay their eggs in animal dung. Their larvae feed on it when they hatch out.

Great diving beetle



WATER BEETLES

The great diving beetle has powerful back legs lined with hairs. It uses them as oars as it swims along in search of insects, tadpoles and even small fish to catch. Although it spends most of its time in the water, it can also fly well.

ANTS, BEES AND WASPS

ANTS, bees and wasps are related. They all have narrow “waists” between their thorax and abdomen. Some kinds live closely together, building nests, gathering food and raising their young in large “colonies”. Bees and some kinds of wasp protect themselves with their sting.



Tarantula hawk wasp

This wasp attacks tarantula spiders. It lays an egg on its prey. The egg hatches out and feeds on the spider.



European wasp

There are more than 50,000 kinds of wasp. Those with black and yellow stripes and a painful sting live in colonies. Their papery nests are made from chewed-up wood fibres.

Ants will fight termites (see pages 16-17) or any other intruder that threatens to attack their nest. They are equipped with powerful jaws. They can also squirt acid at the enemy.



Ant



HOW HONEYBEES LIVE

HONEYBEES live in huge colonies of thousands of bees. The queen is the only bee that lays eggs. One of the male bees, called drones, will mate with the queen. The other female bees are called workers. They build the nest, clean it and protect it from attackers. They gather nectar and pollen from flowers and bring it back to the nest. They “chew” nectar until it turns into sticky honey and store it in the nest as food.



The queen bee lays her eggs inside small hexagonal cells made from wax (left), called the honeycomb. The workers use other cells to store the honey they have made.

INSIDE THE NEST

Inside their wax cells, the eggs soon hatch into larvae (*below left*). They are looked after by the workers and fed with honey and pollen.



After nine days the workers cap the cells with wax. Inside, the larvae turn to pupae (*above right*). Eventually, they emerge as adult bees (*right*).



The queen eventually leaves the colony. She takes some workers with her. Most swarm around her while others go in search of a new nest site.

INSIDE AN ANTS' NEST

AN ANTS' nest is a maze of tunnels and chambers under the ground. Here, the queen ant lays her eggs. The first eggs hatch into worker ants. Workers are females that cannot mate. They keep the nest clean and find food. Later on, winged males and females hatch out. They fly out of the nest to mate. The females become queens.

AN ANT'S LIFE

An ant begins life as a grub, or a larva. It hatches out of an egg laid by the queen. It does nothing but eat, and shed its skin as it grows. When it is large enough, it spins a silk coat around itself. This hardens into a cocoon. Inside, the larva, now known as a pupa, changes into an adult ant.



TERMITES

TERMITES live in large colonies. Each nest has a single king and queen.

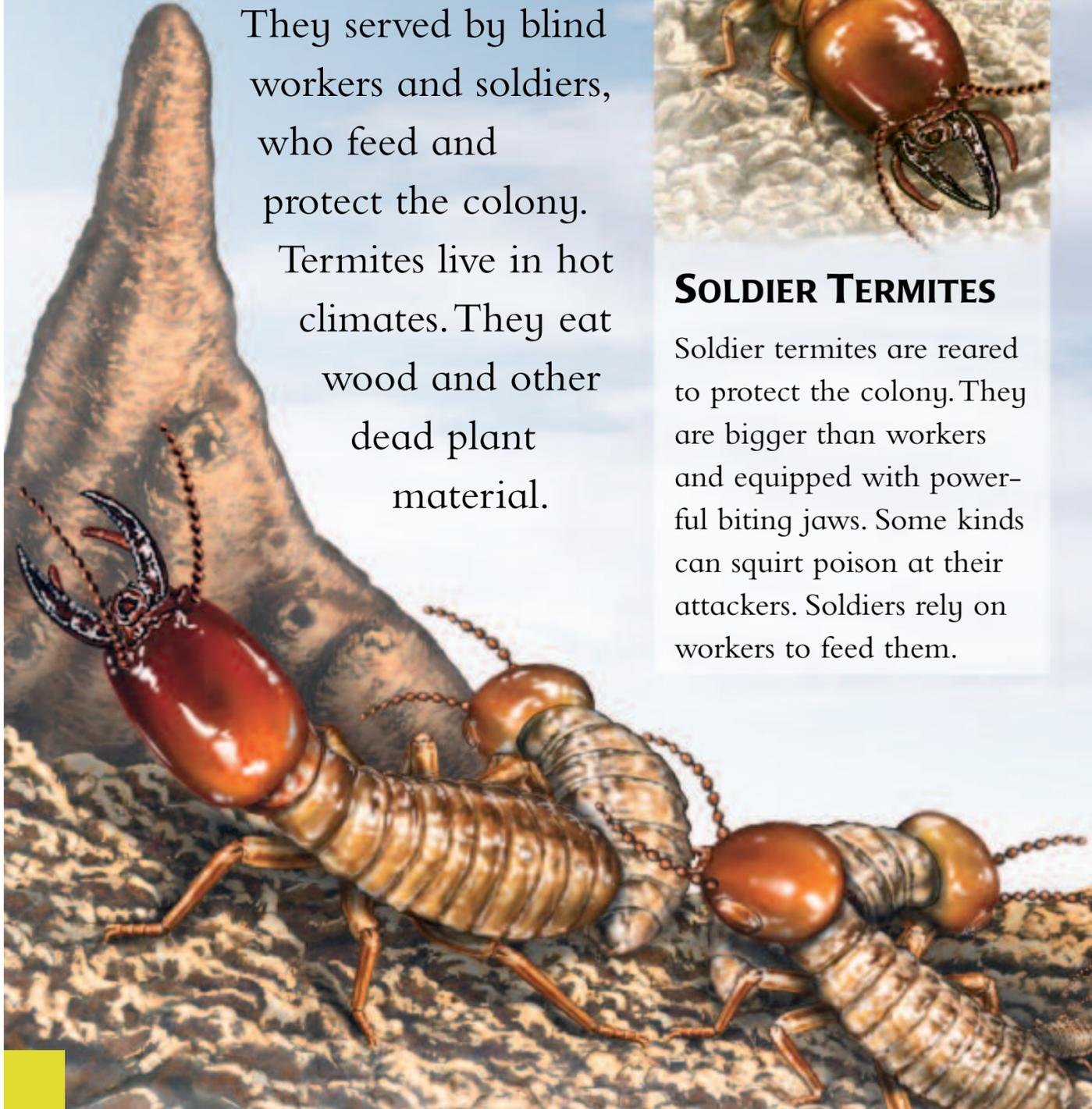
They served by blind workers and soldiers, who feed and protect the colony.

Termites live in hot climates. They eat wood and other dead plant material.



SOLDIER TERMITES

Soldier termites are reared to protect the colony. They are bigger than workers and equipped with powerful biting jaws. Some kinds can squirt poison at their attackers. Soldiers rely on workers to feed them.



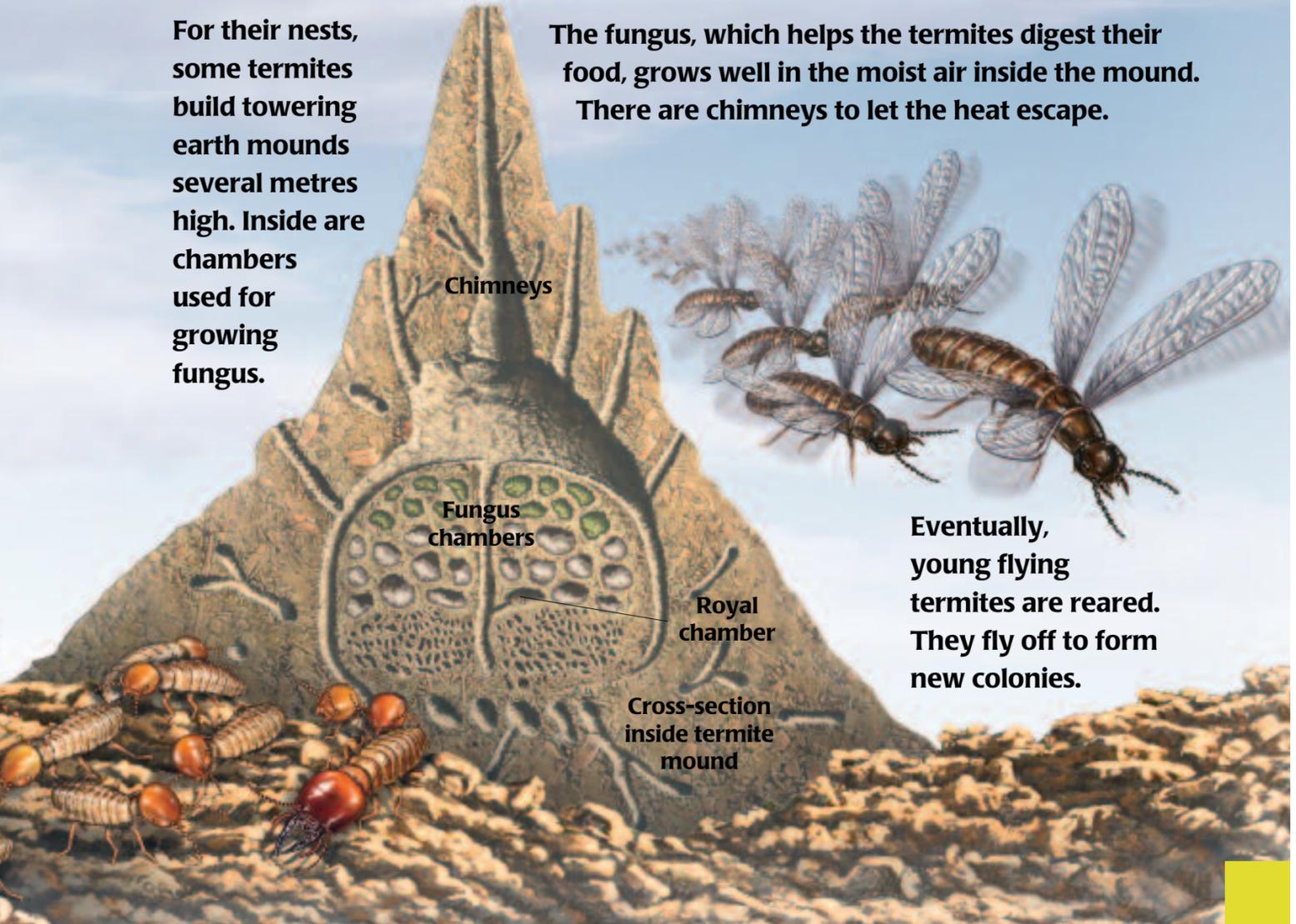
THE ROYAL CHAMBER

The king termite is larger than the workers, but he is dwarfed by the queen. She has a massive swollen abdomen up to 14 cm long. In the royal chamber inside the nest, she produces 30,000 eggs a day. As she lays them, the workers carry them away to other chambers to be hatched out.



For their nests, some termites build towering earth mounds several metres high. Inside are chambers used for growing fungus.

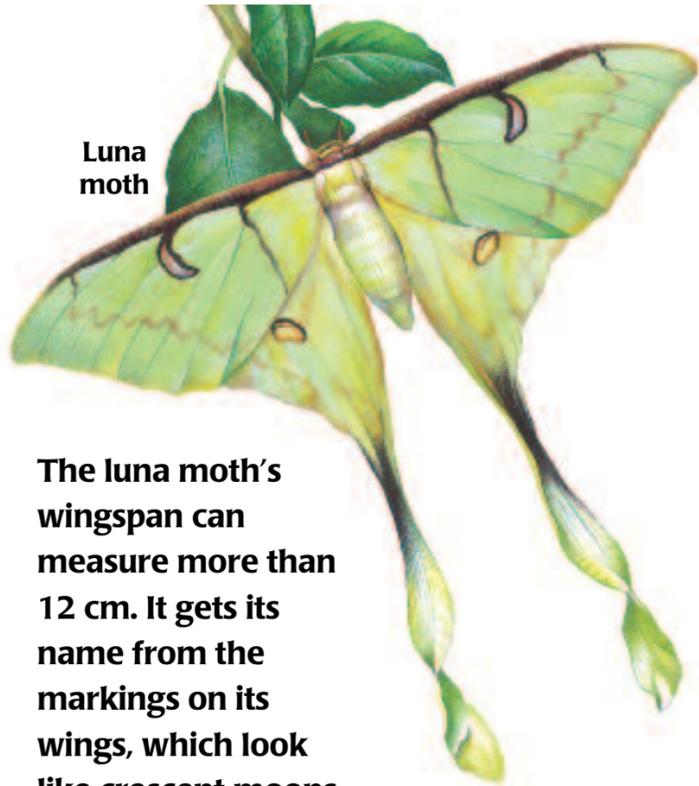
The fungus, which helps the termites digest their food, grows well in the moist air inside the mound. There are chimneys to let the heat escape.



Eventually, young flying termites are reared. They fly off to form new colonies.

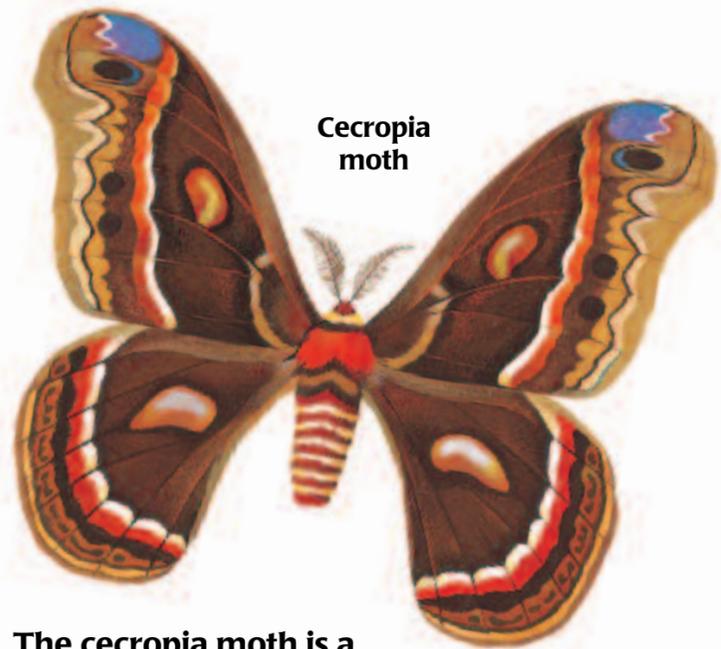
BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

BUTTERFLIES fly during the daytime. They usually have antennae shaped like thin clubs. Most moths are night-flyers. Their antennae are usually feathery in shape.



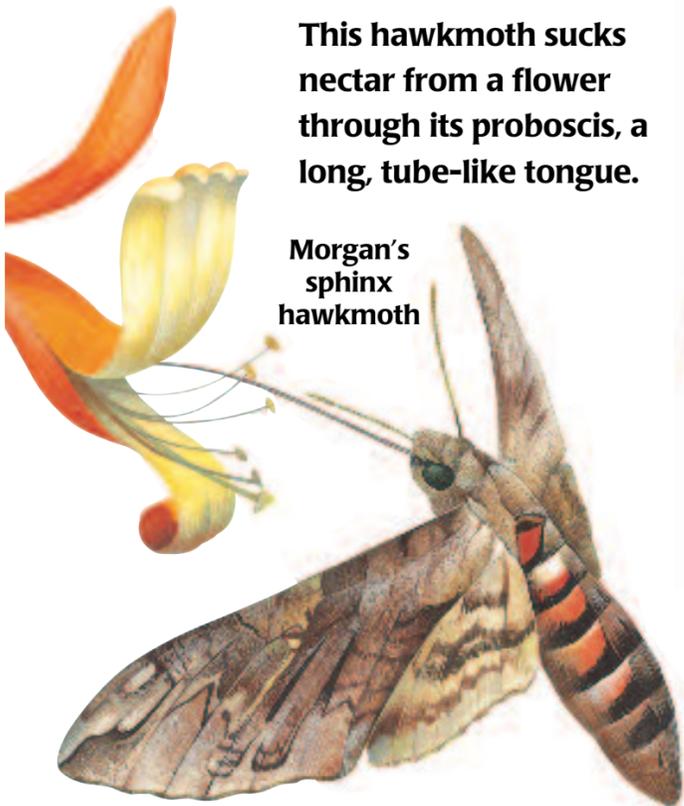
Luna moth

The luna moth's wingspan can measure more than 12 cm. It gets its name from the markings on its wings, which look like crescent moons.



Cecropia moth

The cecropia moth is a kind of silkworm. Its feathery antennae give it a good sense of smell. Like many moths, the caterpillars (called "silkworms") produce silk to make their cocoons. They are bred in special farms to produce silk for cloth.

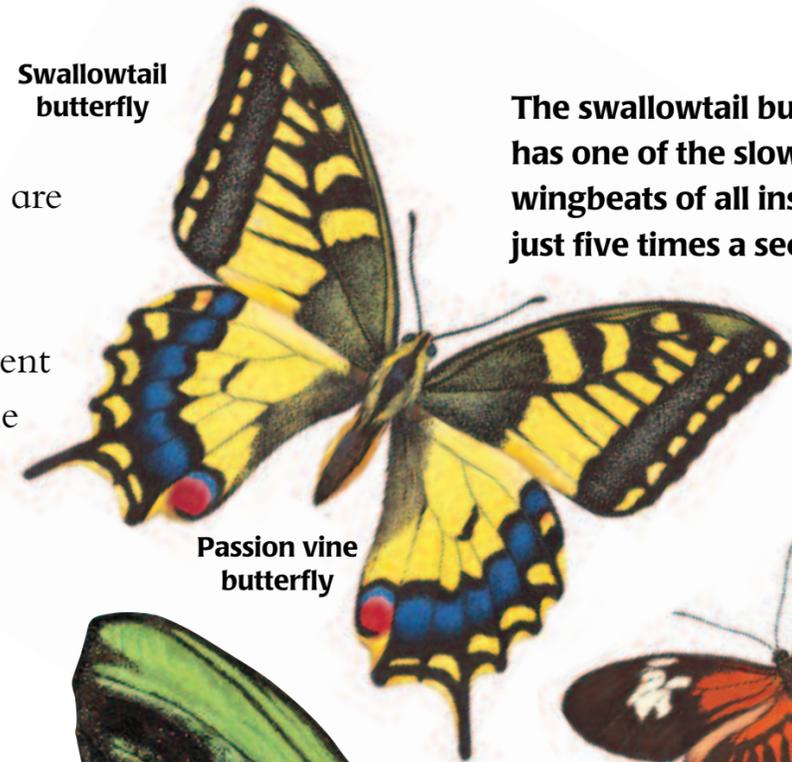


This hawkmoth sucks nectar from a flower through its proboscis, a long, tube-like tongue.

Morgan's sphinx hawkmoth

WINGS

A butterfly's wings are covered in tiny, overlapping scales (*below*). Their different colours produce the familiar wing patterns.



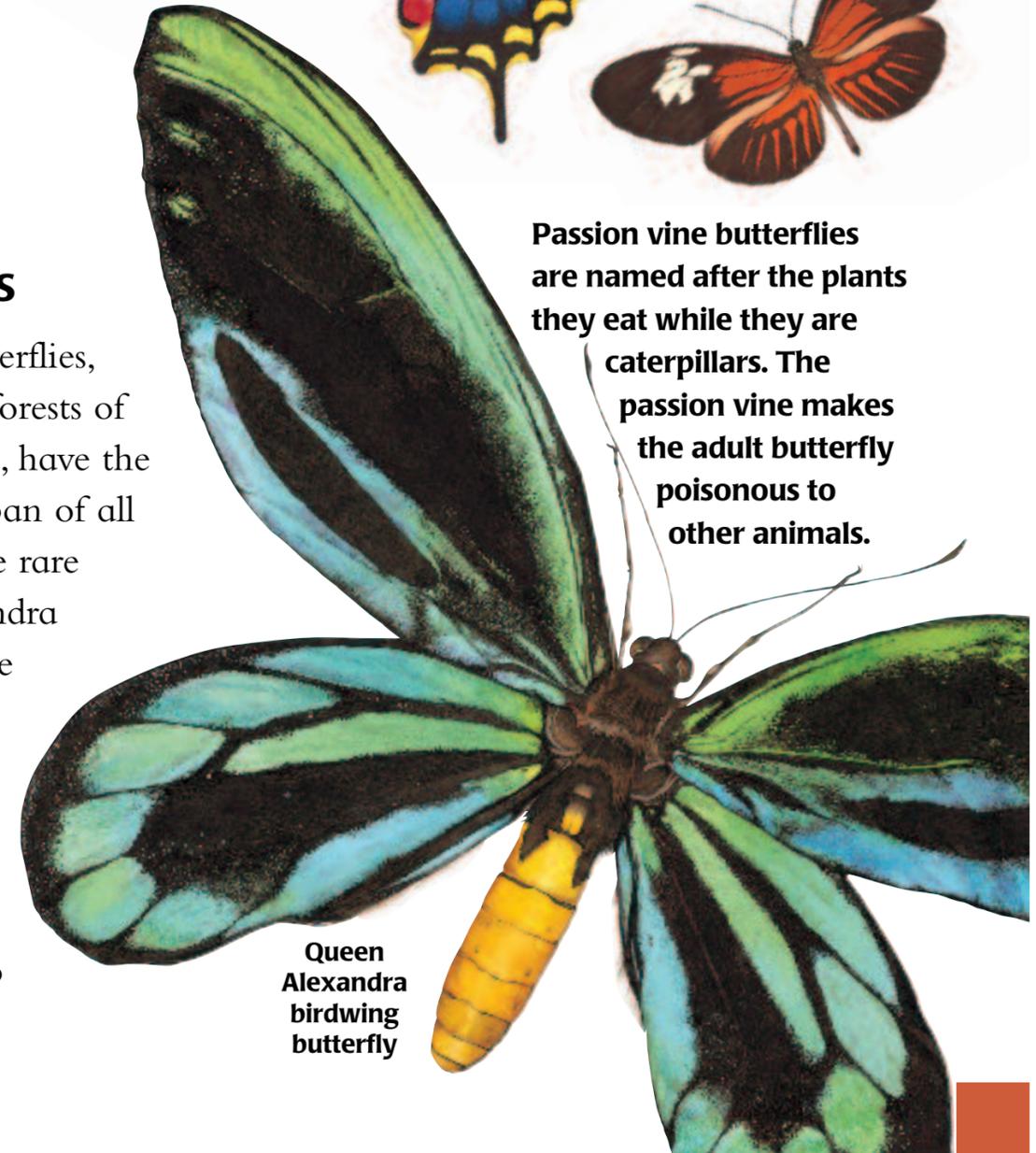
Swallowtail butterfly

Passion vine butterfly

The swallowtail butterfly has one of the slowest wingbeats of all insects: just five times a second.

BIRDWINGS

Birdwing butterflies, from the rainforests of southeast Asia, have the largest wingspan of all butterflies. The rare Queen Alexandra birdwing is the record-holder. Although the males are smaller, the females can measure up to 28 cm across.



Queen Alexandra birdwing butterfly

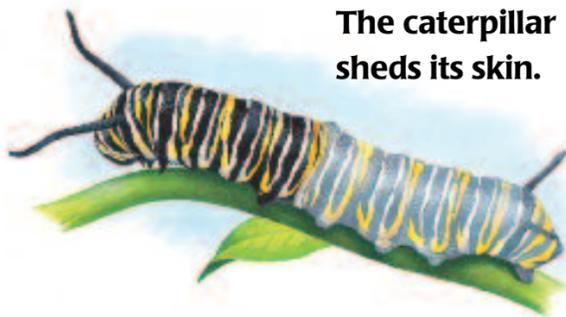
Passion vine butterflies are named after the plants they eat while they are caterpillars. The passion vine makes the adult butterfly poisonous to other animals.

THE LIFE OF A BUTTERFLY

THE monarch butterfly is one of the most amazing insects in the world. Every year, millions of monarchs fly south thousands of kilometres across America to spend winter in Mexican forests.



The monarch caterpillar feeds on milkweed.



The caterpillar sheds its skin.

CATERPILLAR TO CHRYSALIS

Like all butterflies, the female monarch lays her eggs, then flies away, never to

return. A caterpillar hatches out. It feeds on the milkweed plant only, devouring its leaves, flowers and stem. As it grows, it sheds its skin four times. After a few weeks, it weaves a cocoon of silk around its body. It is now a chrysalis. Inside, its body starts to change.



The chrysalis in its cocoon.

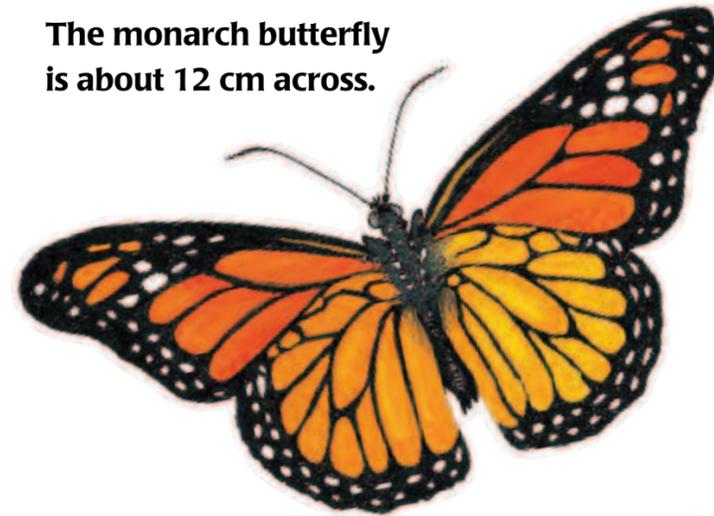
AN ADULT EMERGES

After a few weeks, the adult monarch butterfly climbs out of its silk cocoon. Most kinds of butterflies live quite close to the area where they were born. The female finds a mate, lays her eggs, and more caterpillars are born. But for monarchs, when winter comes, they set out on a journey that takes them south across the United States to the mountains of Mexico.



The adult monarch emerges from its cocoon.

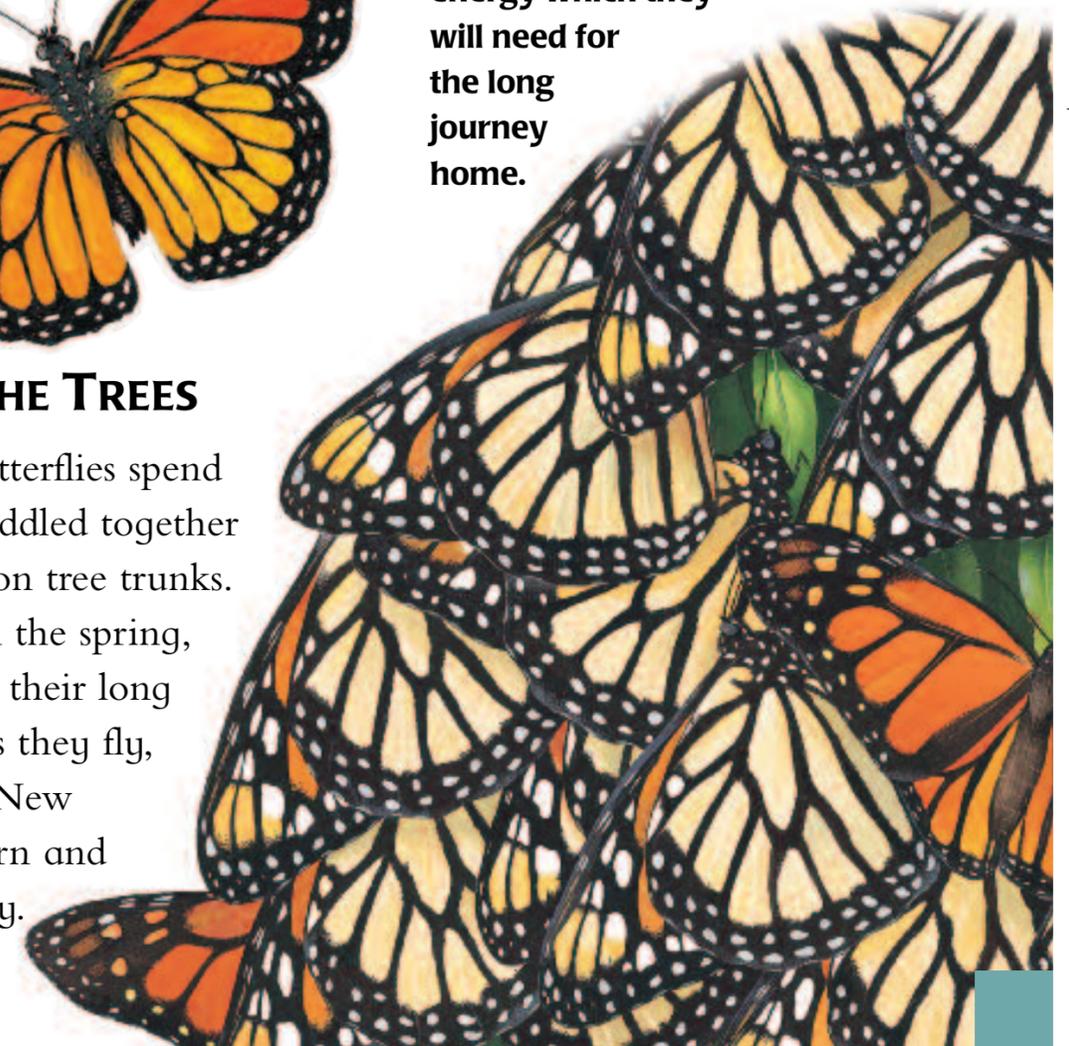
The monarch butterfly is about 12 cm across.



The monarchs rest on tree trunks for most of the winter. They are saving energy which they will need for the long journey home.

ASLEEP ON THE TREES

The monarch butterflies spend winter resting huddled together in their millions on tree trunks. They wake up in the spring, when they begin their long journey home. As they fly, the adults mate. New butterflies are born and continue the story.



FLIES AND MOSQUITOES

FLIES have only one pair of wings, unlike all other insects which have two. Instead of biting jaws, they have mouthparts that suck up food. We often see flies as a nuisance because they spread diseases. But they are essential to the process of decomposing dead animals and plants, and waste. Many kinds also spread pollen or are food for other animals.



Tsetse fly

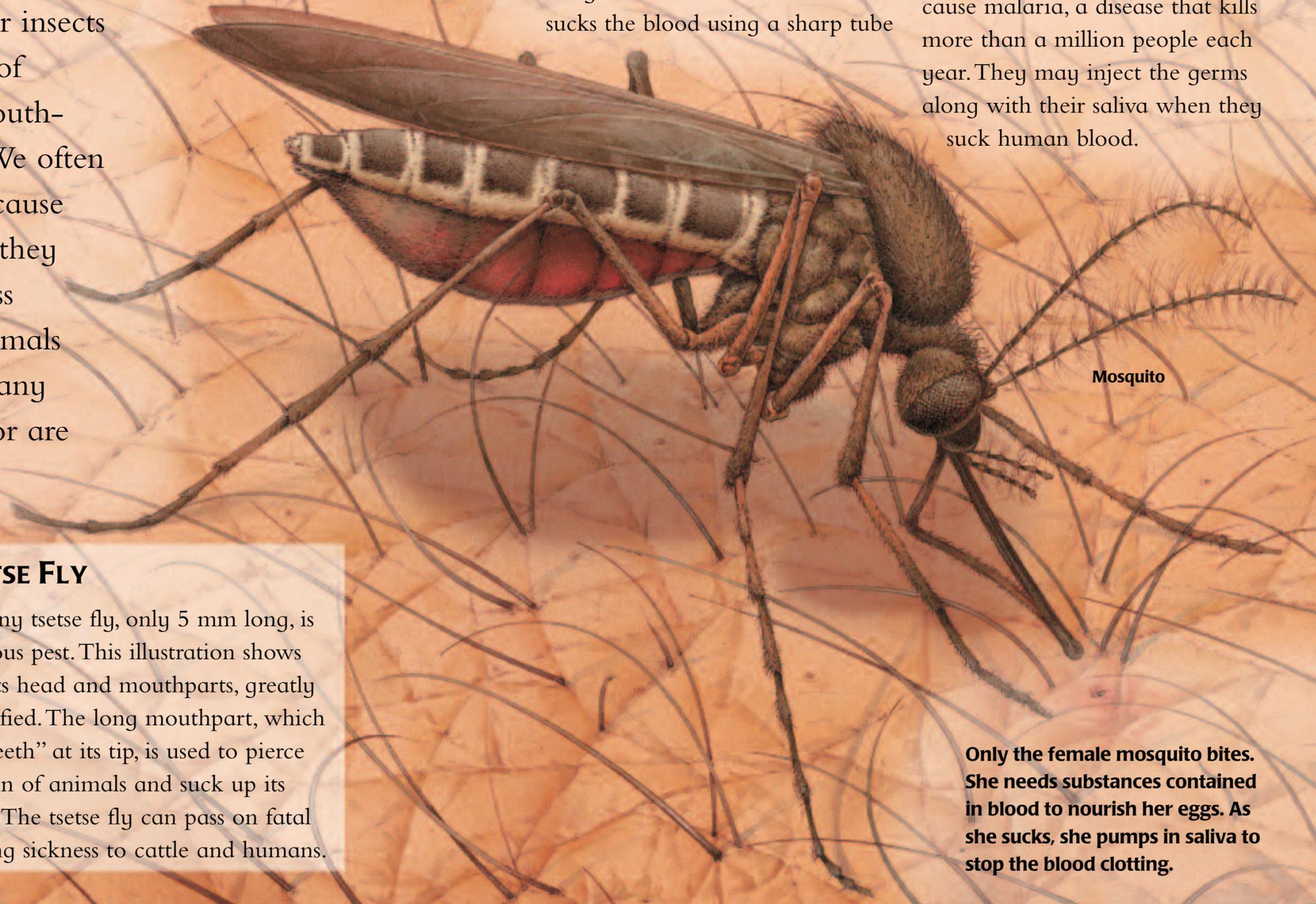
TSETSE FLY

The tiny tsetse fly, only 5 mm long, is a serious pest. This illustration shows only its head and mouthparts, greatly magnified. The long mouthpart, which has “teeth” at its tip, is used to pierce the skin of animals and suck up its blood. The tsetse fly can pass on fatal sleeping sickness to cattle and humans.

A DEADLY INSECT

The mosquito can be extremely dangerous to humans. The female sucks the blood using a sharp tube

called a proboscis to pierce the skin. In some parts of the world, mosquitoes carry the germs that cause malaria, a disease that kills more than a million people each year. They may inject the germs along with their saliva when they suck human blood.



Mosquito

Only the female mosquito bites. She needs substances contained in blood to nourish her eggs. As she sucks, she pumps in saliva to stop the blood clotting.

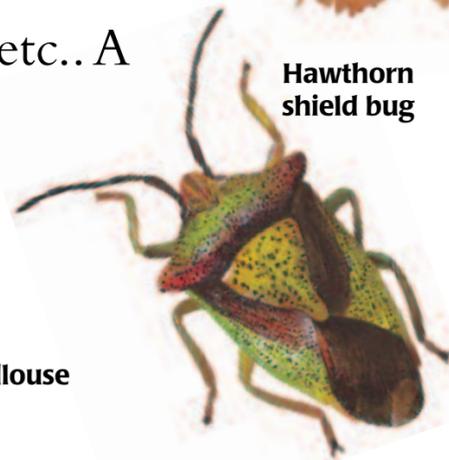
TYPES OF INSECT

THERE are probably more than 10 million types of insect. They are divided into a number of major groups: ants, flies, bugs, cockroaches etc.. A few different types are illustrated on this page.



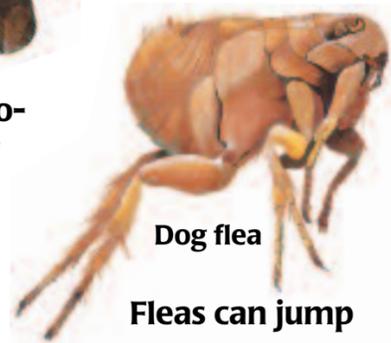
Hissing cockroach

The hissing cockroach protects itself by puffing up with air to look bigger. When the air is forced out, it sounds like hissing.



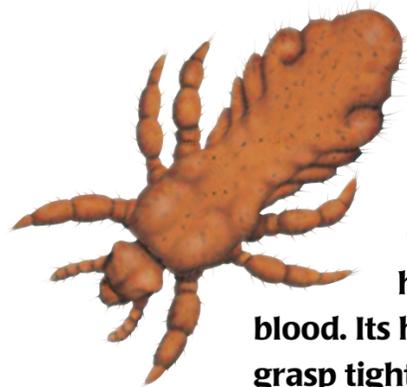
Hawthorn shield bug

Shield bugs are so-called because of their distinctive shape. If attacked, they squirt out a foul-smelling liquid.



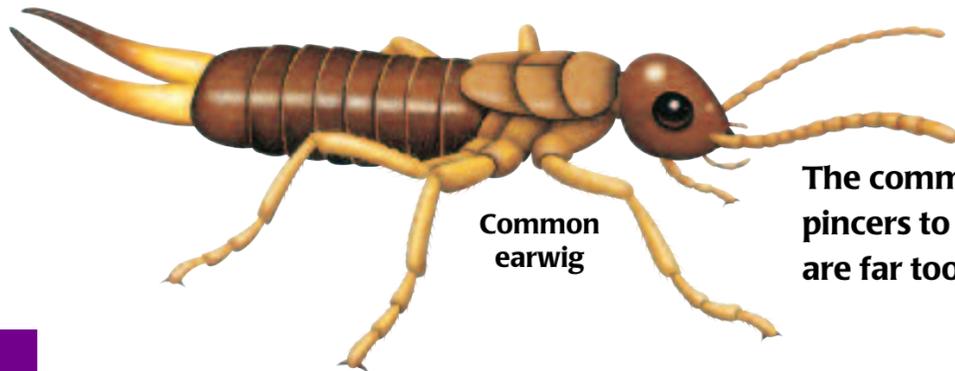
Dog flea

Fleas can jump over 500 times their own length. They feed on the blood of larger animals such as rats.



Headlouse

The headlouse feeds on human blood. Its huge claws grasp tightly to strands of our hair.



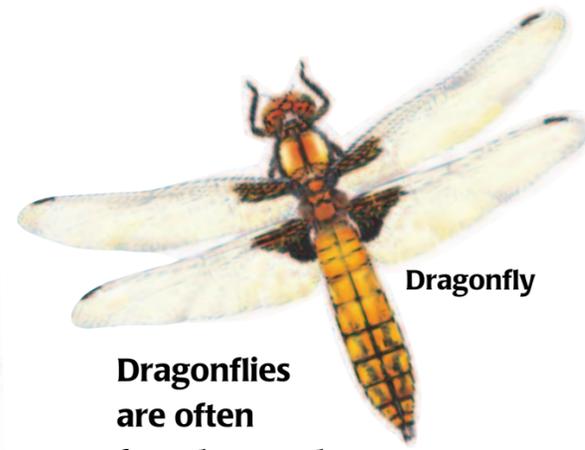
Common earwig

The common earwig uses its pincers to capture prey. They are far too small to hurt humans.

PRAYING MANTIS

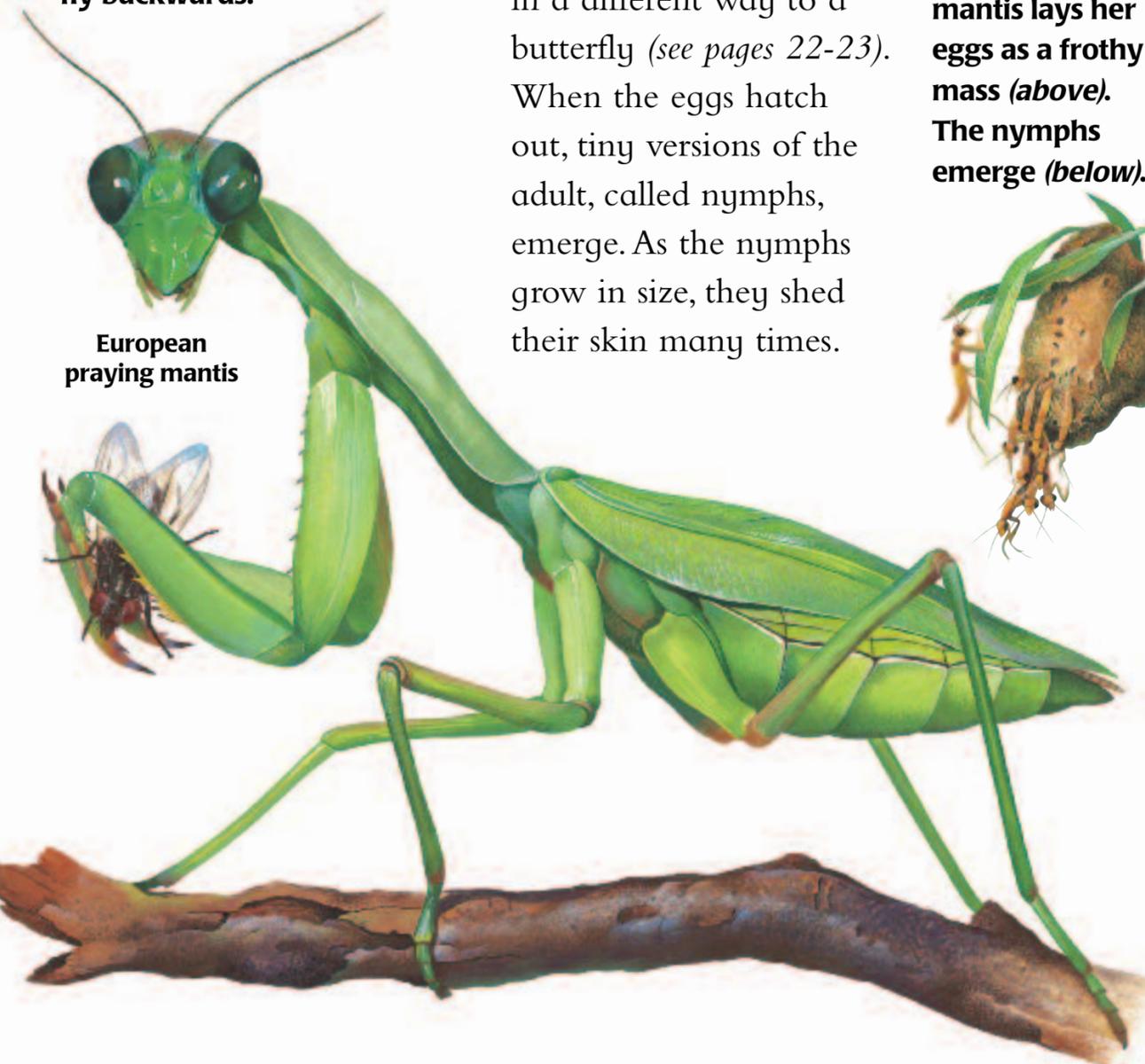
The praying mantis is a terrifying predator. It sits with its front legs up, as if praying, waiting to feed. When it spies its victim, it flicks out its spiny front legs to trap it.

The mantis reproduces in a different way to a butterfly (see pages 22-23). When the eggs hatch out, tiny versions of the adult, called nymphs, emerge. As the nymphs grow in size, they shed their skin many times.



Dragonfly

Dragonflies are often found around ponds. They feed on other flying insects. They can fly at great speed, hover, and even fly backwards.



European praying mantis



The female mantis lays her eggs as a frothy mass (above). The nymphs emerge (below).



SPIDERS AND SCORPIONS

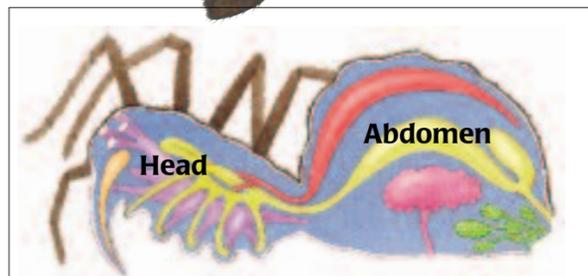
SPIDERS, scorpions and mites are not insects but arachnids. They have eight legs and two grasping “limbs” called pedipalps. Spiders have two body parts and many pairs of eyes. All spiders can produce silk, but only some kinds use it for making webs.

jumping spiders capture their prey by leaping at it with fangs ready to strike.



Jumping spider

Bird-eating spiders live in the rainforests of South America. Their leg span may be as wide as a dinner plate! Despite their name, they feed mainly on other insects. They will also eat small lizards.



INSIDE A SPIDER

This is a cross-section inside a spider's body. The head contains the brain (purple) and stomach (yellow). The other digestive organs (also yellow) heart (red) silk glands (green), ovary (pink) are in its abdomen.

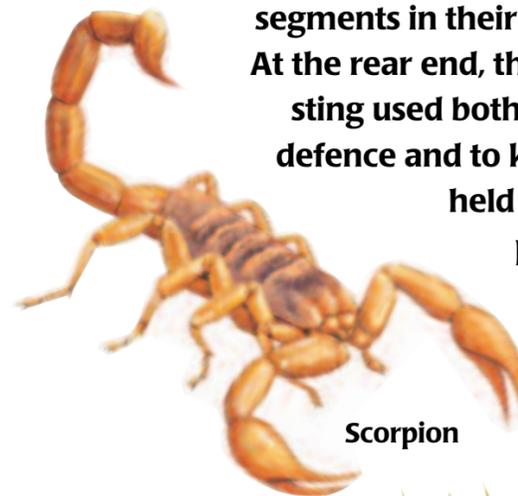


Many spiders produce poison to paralyse their prey. Most are completely harmless to humans, but the bite of some species, such as the black widow, can be fatal.

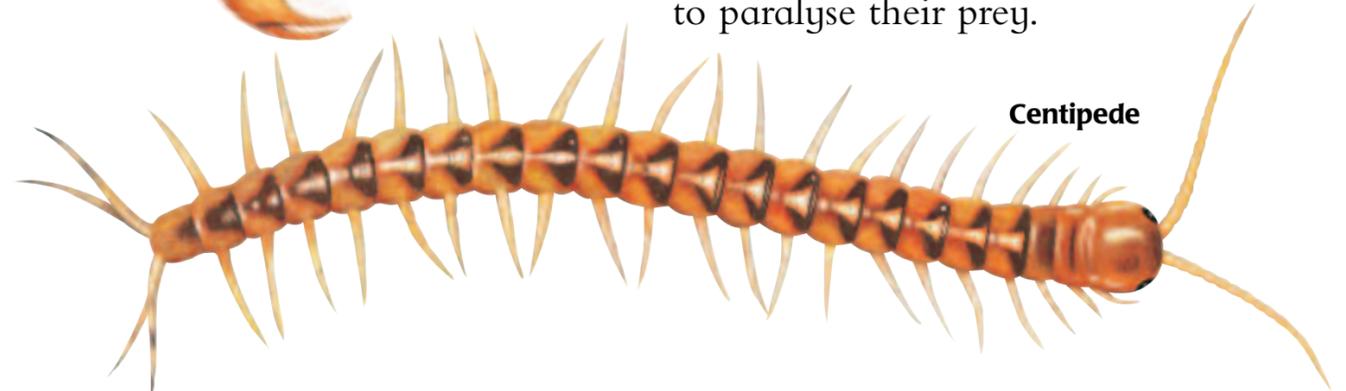
Bird-eating spider

Many kinds of mite are less than 1 mm long. Dust mites feed on skin flakes.

Scorpions have many segments in their bodies. At the rear end, there is a sting used both in self-defence and to kill prey held in their pincers.



Scorpion



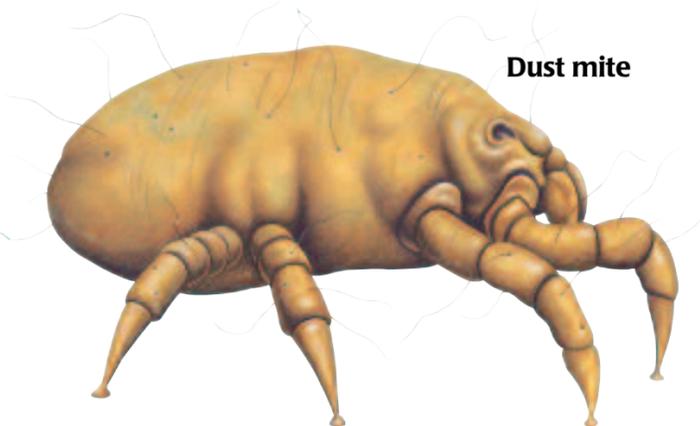
Centipede



Millipede

MILLIPEDES

Millipedes and centipedes are types of as myriapod, a name meaning “many legs”. Millipedes eat mainly plants and move very slowly. Their tube-like bodies and short legs allow them to squeeze into tiny spaces.



Dust mite

CENTIPEDES

Centipedes prey on other creatures. They can run quickly, their bodies waving from side to side as they scuttle along on their long legs. They use the venom glands on their heads to paralyse their prey.

HOW A SPIDER SPINS ITS WEB

MANY spiders catch their prey by spinning webs. These can be of a great variety of shapes, including delicate spirals, irregular cobwebs or thick funnels.

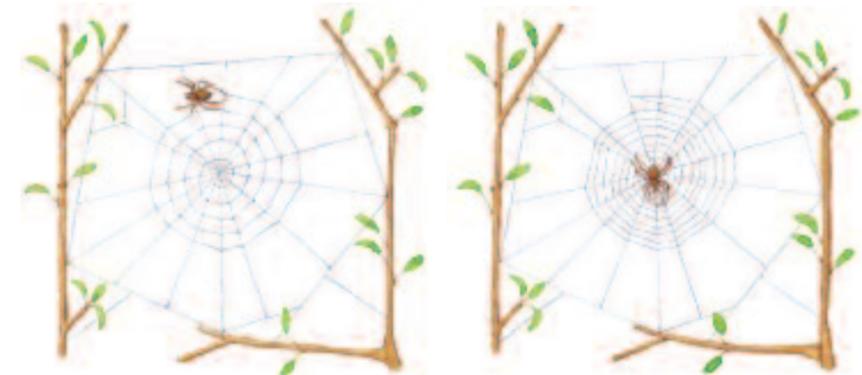
Once an insect is caught in the web, the spider can tell exactly where it is by feeling the vibrations using the hairs on their legs. It then hurries to claim its victim.



First, the spider joins two branches with a line of silk.

A vertical line anchors the web at the bottom.

Radiating lines are linked together at the central hub.



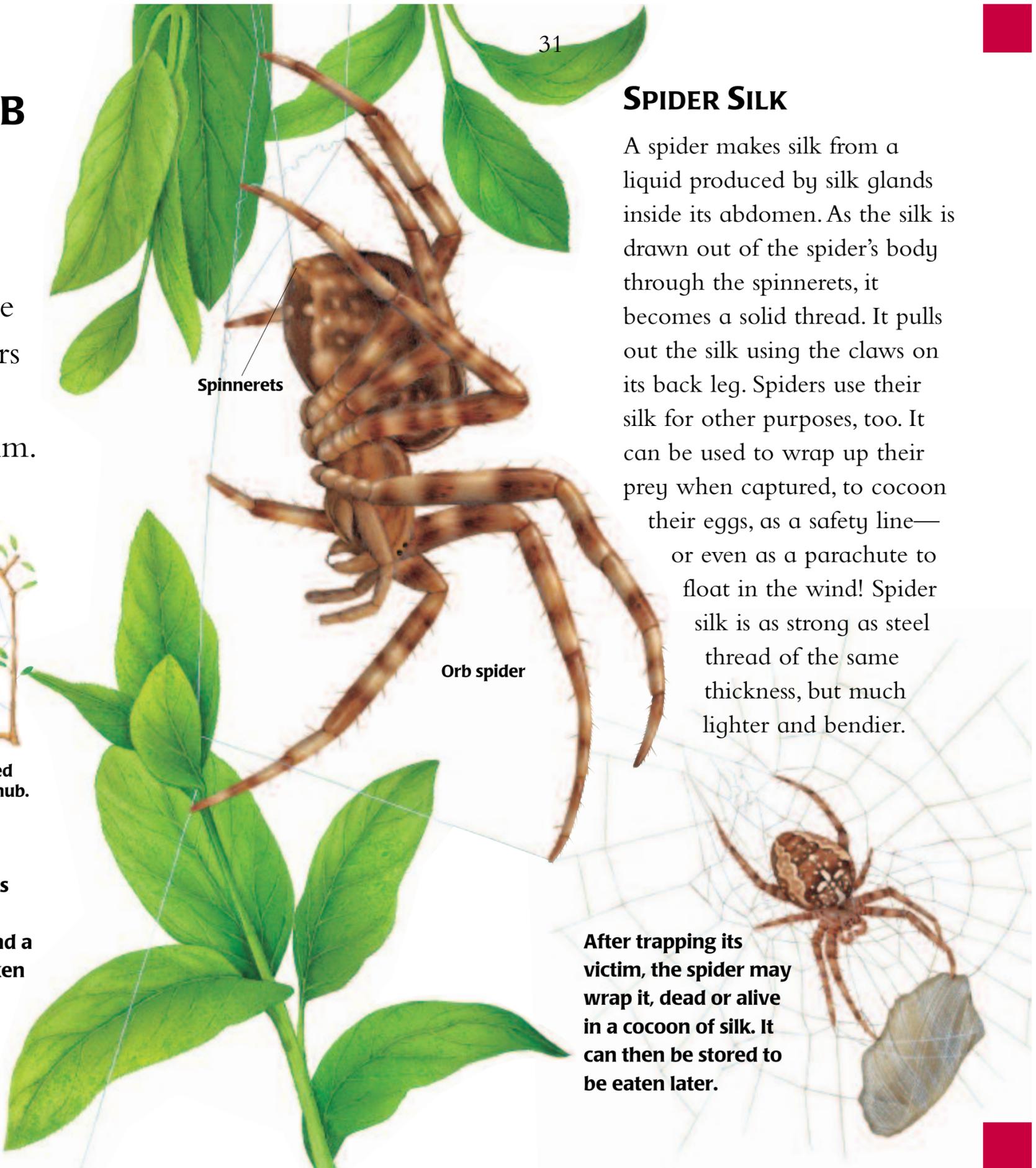
Finally, the spider lays down the sticky spiral strands.

The spider waits for its first victim in the dry centre.

The orb spider, often found in gardens, spins webs like these. They usually only last around a day before being broken by wind or rain. It can take as little as an hour for the spider to make a new one.

SPIDER SILK

A spider makes silk from a liquid produced by silk glands inside its abdomen. As the silk is drawn out of the spider's body through the spinnerets, it becomes a solid thread. It pulls out the silk using the claws on its back leg. Spiders use their silk for other purposes, too. It can be used to wrap up their prey when captured, to cocoon their eggs, as a safety line—or even as a parachute to float in the wind! Spider silk is as strong as steel thread of the same thickness, but much lighter and bendier.



After trapping its victim, the spider may wrap it, dead or alive in a cocoon of silk. It can then be stored to be eaten later.

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