

Name: _____

Scorpions

By Guy Belleranti

If you've ever seen a scorpion, I doubt you would consider it a "cute and cuddly" creature. With its big, claw-like pincers and its long, curled tail and venomous stinger, a scorpion is definitely a scary sight. However, only around 30 of the nearly 2,000 species of scorpions have venom considered dangerous to humans.

Like spiders and other arachnids, scorpions have eight legs and eat meat. They live in deserts, grasslands, forests, and jungles. You can find scorpions on every continent except Antarctica.

Scorpions are nocturnal, or active during the night. They often hide in dark, cool places like leaf litter,

burrows, and caves. And, yes, they like dark corners in buildings and homes, too. Yikes!

Ancient relatives of scorpions lived before the dinosaurs. Some of these prehistoric, scorpion-like creatures grew up to several feet in length. Wow! Luckily, today's scorpions are a lot smaller. Most are less than three inches. You might be surprised to learn that the smallest scorpions are often the most dangerous. Some examples of deadly scorpions are the Indian red scorpion, the Deathstalker of Africa and the Middle East, and the Arizona bark scorpion. Most large species, including the eight-inch African emperor scorpion, are much less dangerous.

Scorpions don't have a good sense of sight. But they do have sensory hair-like structures on their legs and bodies. These structures are capable of feeling vibrations from nearby predators, including tarantulas, centipedes, lizards, owls, bats, shrews, and mice. They can also feel vibrations from their prey, which include a variety of insects, centipedes, spiders, and sometimes, even other scorpions. Some larger species of scorpions eat small lizards and mice. Most scorpions hide and wait for their prey to come



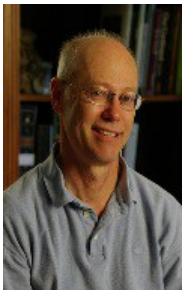
closer. Then – crunch! They grab the unsuspecting prey with their pincers. Sometimes a scorpion will use its stinger to overcome its prey. All species of scorpions have digestive juices that help soften the scorpion's food, allowing for easy consumption.

You might be wondering where scorpions get enough water to drink, especially those species that live in arid climates. Surprisingly, scorpions get most of their water from prey. Their waxy exoskeleton keeps moisture in their bodies.

Unlike other arachnids, scorpions don't lay eggs. Instead, the babies are born live. They crawl onto their mother's back and remain there until after their first molt. What is molting? It's growing out of an old exoskeleton. Scorpions molt several times before becoming adults.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating things about scorpions is that their venom can actually help people if used medicinally. Scientists have discovered its helpfulness in treating some cancers and pain. Hopefully, researchers will discover more helpful medical uses for scorpion venom.

About the Author



Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo. Predators include tarantulas, centipedes, lizards, owls, bats, shrews and mice.

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1. According to the information in the article, which of the following statements about scorpions is true?
 - a. Scorpions live on every continent on Earth except Australia.
 - b. There are more than 3,000 species of scorpions.
 - c. More than half of all scorpion species are deadly to humans.
 - d. In general, the smaller the species of scorpion, the more deadly it is.

2. Which of the following does a scorpion rely on to catch its prey?
 - a. an exceptional sense of smell
 - b. sensory hairs on its body that help it feel vibrations from other animals
 - c. an excellent sense of sight
 - d. powerful jaws that help it crush its prey

3. How does a scorpion get enough water to drink, especially in desert climates?

4. How can a scorpion's venom help people?

5. Identify three of the world's deadliest scorpions that were mentioned in the article.

_____, _____, and

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| _____ 1. venomous | a. an extremely dry climate |
| _____ 2. fascinating | b. unaware of the presence of danger |
| _____ 3. arachnids | c. the eating or ingesting of food |
| _____ 4. unsuspecting | d. a hard outer covering on the bodies of arthropods that protects them |
| _____ 5. prehistoric | e. animals that eat other animals |
| _____ 6. exoskeleton | f. toxic; poisonous |
| _____ 7. consumption | g. a classification of animals that includes spiders and scorpions |
| _____ 8. arid | h. animals that get eaten by other animals |
| _____ 9. predators | i. highly interesting |
| _____ 10. prey | j. dating back to a time before humans kept written records |

