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INTRODUCTION

They might be hard to see sometimes, but insects make up 80 per cent of all the world's species. It is estimated that there are 10 quintillion insects alive – that's 10,000,000,000,000,000,000 or 10 billion billion creepy-crawlies.

Of course, not all creepy-crawlies are insects. There are 47,500 spider species alone, as well as earthworms, millipedes and many other different kinds of creatures. This book ranks some of the strangest, by looking at...

- ☆ The amazing ways they hide from view
- ☆ The astonishing powers of these mighty mini-beasts
- ☆ How ferocious they are

Read on and find out about some of the strangest creepy-crawlies that you would be lucky, or unlucky, to encounter, including:

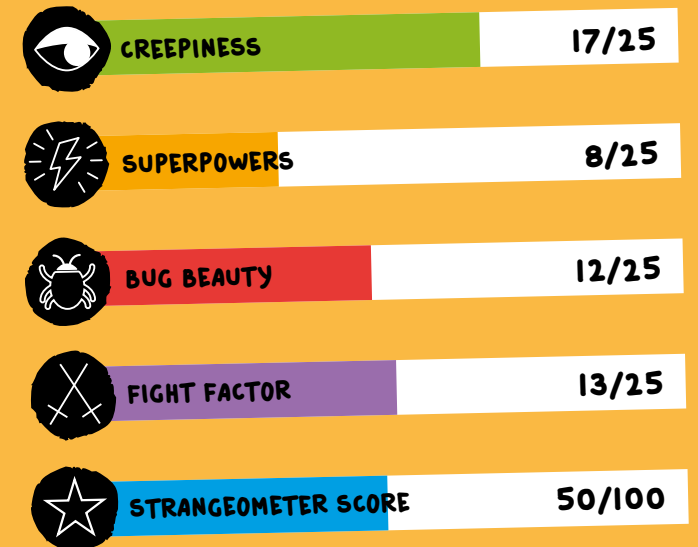
- ☆ The tiny terror that blows itself up to save its friends
 - ☆ A crazy snail that turns into a zombie
 - ☆ A creature that is so well disguised even its own species can't spot it
 - ☆ A monstrous spider that's as big as a dinner plate
- ... and lots more of the world's most fantastically strange creepy-crawlies.

STRANGEOMETER

The creatures in this book are all unique in their own ways, so we've used a special strangeometer to rank them against each other. This is made up of four categories with a mark out of 25 for each.

These categories are...

STRANGEOMETER



CREEPINESS



How likely are they to make you shiver?

SUPERPOWERS



What special skills do these creatures have to make them stand out from the norm?

BUG BEAUTY



You might think some bugs are ugly, but how good-looking are these lovely creatures?

FIGHT FACTOR



They might be small, but how much fight do they have?

STRANGEOMETER SCORE



These are added up to get a strangeometer score out of 100!

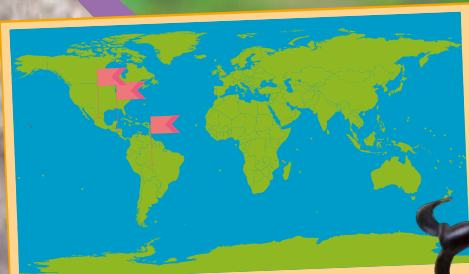
#40

Male elephant beetles have horns like elephant tusks which they use to fight for female mates and food.

I LIKE MY FOOD TO BE ROTTEN AND DECAYING.

ELEPHANT BEETLE

The elephant beetle is one of the giants of the insect world, ranging from 8–13cm (3–5in) long! Don't worry, they may look fierce but they only eat fruit and flowers.



Mexico, and Central and South American rainforests

Scientists are turning elephant beetles into cyborg robots. The beetles are strong enough to carry a backpack that allows them to be controlled with a video game handset. It's all in a good cause – hopefully the flying insects will be able to take part in rescue missions and find people trapped in rubble after earthquakes or explosions. They might even be able to help track down criminals!



STRANGEOMETER



CREEPINESS

5/25



SUPERPOWERS

9/25



BUG BEAUTY

14/25



FIGHT FACTOR

3/25



STRANGEOMETER SCORE

31/100

Quiz

See if you can answer these questions on the ten creepy-crawlies you've just learned about!

1.

Where does the happy-face spider live?

3.

What does the hickory horned devil turn into?

4.

What did the people who discovered the giant Gippsland earthworm think it was?

5. What type of insect is a fairyfly?

6.

What did the Victorians do with jewel beetles?

8.

What do caddisfly larvae use to make a suit of armour?

7.

What is the world's biggest butterfly?

10.

What do elephant beetles eat?

9.

What creepy-crawly is this?

What creepy-crawly is this?

2.

ANSWERS

1. IN THE RAINFORESTS OF HAWAII 2. HOT-PINK SLUG
3. THE REGAL MOTH 4. A SNAKE 5. A WASP 6. THEY WORE THEM AS BROOCHES 7. QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S BIRDWING 8. THEY STICK TWIGS, SAND, GRAVEL OR EVEN GEMS TO THEIR BODIES WITH SILK
9. MILLIPEDE 10. FRUIT AND FLOWERS

#30

ZOMBIE SNAIL

Amber snails eat bird poo. That's weird enough you might think, but there's worse to come. Tiny creatures called parasites live in the poo and so they get eaten, too. The parasites then take control of the snail's brain, making them do some very strange things!



The parasite living inside the amber snail wants the snail to be eaten so it can get inside the bird poo again, and brainwash another snail.

Once a parasite is inside, it takes over the snail's brain, turning it into a zombie. The poor snail has to do whatever the parasite wants!

The parasites turn the snail's eye-stalks into crazy tentacles. Then they make the snail move into the sunlight, where its weird eyes flash a signal to passing birds, saying, 'come and eat me!'

BIRDS THINK MY COLOURFUL EYE STALKS LOOK LIKE YUMMY CATERpillars!

STRANGEOMETER

 CREEPINESS 25/25

 SUPERPOWERS 25/25

 BUG BEAUTY 7/25

 FIGHT FACTOR 0/25

 STRANGEOMETER SCORE 57/100

#29

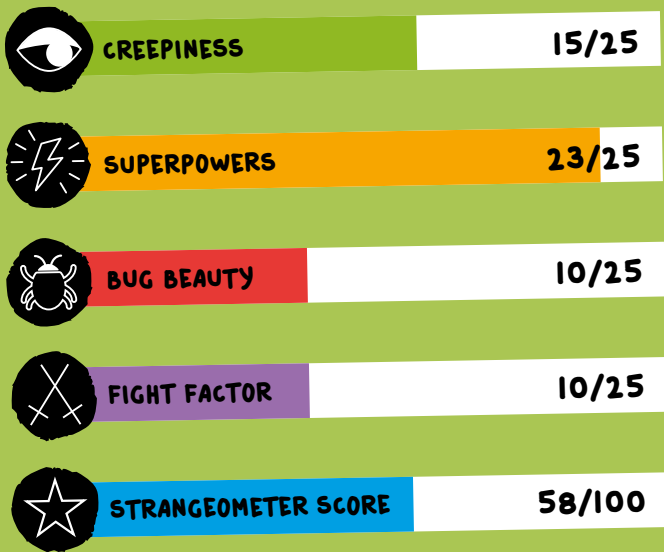
I'M SO LOUD THAT PEOPLE
WALKING ON THE RIVERBANK
CAN HEAR ME SINGING ON
THE RIVERBED.

LESSER WATER BOATMAN

This tiny insect, measuring only
2mm (0.01in), is the
loudest animal
on Earth for
its size.



STRANGEOMETER



The lesser water boatman's song is as loud as a passing freight train (78.9 decibels), although scientists have recorded one water boatman bellowing out its song at 99.2 decibels. That's like sitting in the front row at a concert and hearing an orchestra playing! Passers-by are not deafened because the insects sit at the bottom of rivers and the sound is muffled by water.

The water boatman carries a bubble of air around to help it breathe underwater!

#1

EXPLODING ANT



It may look small and harmless, but this creepy-crawly has an extreme way of protecting its home and its family. If it feels threatened, it explodes, killing itself and covering its enemy with poisonous goo!

Scientists have found that it doesn't take much to make an exploding ant blow itself up – just a light touch will do.

Of all the defence tactics you will have heard about, the exploding ant's self-destruct skill is the most extreme! The Malaysian exploding ant is different to most other bugs because it sacrifices itself for the good of its colony. Scientists call this *autothysis*, a word which comes from the Greek words for self and sacrifice.

Ants always look out for their fellow ants, and by exploding they can scare off competitors or predators and save their colony.

When the ant explodes, it dies, and sometimes the invading insect dies, too. If the ant's attacker (usually another ant) survives, it learns to stay well away from this kind of ant in the future!

When it senses danger, the ant contracts its abdomen, causing its poison glands to explode.

I AIM MY GOO AT MY ENEMY'S FACE!

STRANGEOMETER



CREEPINESS

25/25



SUPERPOWERS

25/25



BUG BEAUTY

25/25



FIGHT FACTOR

25/25



STRANGEOMETER SCORE

100/100



quiz

See if you can answer these questions on the ten creepy-crawlies you've just learned about!



1.

What creepy-crawly is this?

3.

Leaf insects are such masters of disguise that they sometimes do what?

How many more times its own body weight can the glasswing butterfly carry?

4.

How did the death's-head hawkmoth get its name?

2.



What creepy-crawly is this?

6.

What does the assassin bug stick to its body?

8.

What are the balls on a Brazilian treehopper's head for?

7.

5.

What is the world's deadliest caterpillar?

9.

What powers did the ancient Greeks think the devil's flower mantis had?

10.

Why does the exploding ant explode?

ANSWERS

1. EASTERN DOBSONFLY 2. FROM THE SKULL-SHAPED MARKING ON ITS BODY
3. TAKE A BITE OUT OF EACH OTHER! 4. 40 TIMES MORE! 5. THE GIANT
SILKWORM MOTH CATERPILLAR 6. BIRD-DUNG GRAB SPIDER 7. THE BODIES
OF ITS VICTIMS 8. NOBODY KNOWS, BUT THEY MAY BE TO MAKE THEM HARDER
FOR PREDATORS TO GRAB 9. THEY THOUGHT ITS SPIT COULD BLIND YOU, AND
THAT A HORSE WOULD DIE IF IT ATE ONE 10. TO PROTECT ITS HOME
AND FAMILY