

The Spider

A spider is a small, eight-legged animal. Spiders are best known for the silk they spin. They use their silk to catch large and small insects, their main food.

Many spiders make webs with their threads of silk. They use the webs as traps. If you look closely at a web, you can see the pretty patterns the spider makes. But some spiders do not make webs. One kind of spider jumps onto an insect. Another spider uses its silk like a fishing line. It swings the line until it catches a bug. Then it reels up the line to eat its catch.

Spiders look like many of the insects they eat. But they are not insects. Spiders belong to a group called arachnids. All arachnids have eight legs. None of them have feelers, and none have wings. Mites and ticks belong to this class of animals.

Spiders lay eggs. Some large spiders lay 2,000 eggs at a time. One small spider lays just one egg. Many spiders die after they lay their eggs. The babies must learn to take care of themselves.

A lot of people are afraid of spiders, but only a few spiders can hurt humans. In fact, spiders are very helpful. They get rid of many harmful pests.

A tarantula is a kind of spider. It is large and hairy. Once people thought that a tarantula's bite could give a person a terrible disease. Someone bitten by the tarantula might jump into the air. He or she might make strange noises. But this belief is not true.

You can find tarantulas in many warm climates including the American Southwest. American tarantulas lead fairly quiet lives. These spiders cannot hurt you any more than a bee can.

Some spiders are very dangerous. The black widow is one of these spiders. Its bite is extremely painful. The bite can make you sick for a long time. Only the female black widow can hurt you. She has a shiny black body. It is about the size of a pea. Her long legs are very thin. If you turn her over, you can see a red or yellow mark on her body. But don't try to turn this spider over!

You can find black widows in almost every state. She often makes her webs in dark corners. This spider will not attack you. She will bite only if you bother her.

Reading Time _____

Are you interested in becoming a bird-watcher? One of the first things for a beginner to learn is how to recognize common birds by their shapes. Many parts of a bird's body give clues to its identity. Things to look at are body shape and size. Also look at the length and shape of the tail. The wing shape, bill type, and leg length are still other clues. Where a bird makes its nest provides clues, too.

First, consider the tail. Some tails are forked, like a barn swallow's tail. Some tails are round, like a blue jay's tail, or pointed, like a dove's tail. A mockingbird has a long tail, while the robin's tail is medium length. Some birds, like woodpeckers, use their tails as braces when standing on a tree trunk.

Looking at a bird's beak can help you tell what it is also. Hawks and owls have the large, hooked beaks of meat eaters. The vulture has a less sharply hooked beak. Woodpeckers need long, strong beaks for tapping away at trees all day. The kingfisher's long, pointed beak helps it catch fish more easily. The nighthawk has a very small beak for its size. Its mouth opens wide, however, to scoop in insects while it flies.

Bird-watchers can also use beaks to tell the difference between birds of similar shapes. For instance, the blue jay and the cardinal are shaped alike. When it is dark and you cannot see their color, you can confuse the two birds because of their shapes. The cardinal, however, has a short, thick bill. It is a seedeater. The blue jay is the one with a long, thin beak.

Many birds look alike when they fly. It can be hard to tell them apart by their shapes when they are high in the sky. Geese and cranes may both fly in V-shaped flocks, but other things are different. Cranes fly with their long necks and legs outstretched. Geese also fly with long necks outstretched, but their shorter legs do not go beyond their tail feathers. Herons, which look like cranes, fly with their long necks folded in an S shape.

Keep these hints in mind when you set out to watch birds. See which birds you can recognize and name. Be aware that it takes time to learn all the things that an expert bird-watcher knows. No one becomes an expert overnight.

Reading Time _____