



#8916

TARANTULAS

Grade Levels: 5-12

26 minutes

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DESCRIPTION

Rick West loves tarantulas and is a world expert on this large, hairy spider. His knowledge of tarantulas combines with closeup photography to provide insight into their habitats, physical characteristics, enemies, and mating habits. Contrary to popular opinion, no one has ever died from a tarantula's bite, though many have been uncomfortable.

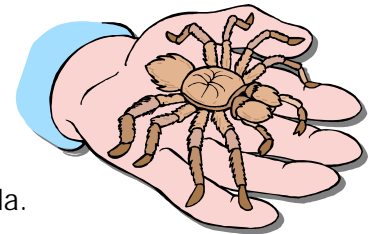
ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: Life Sciences

- ◆ Standard: Understands relationships among organisms and their physical environment
 - Benchmark: Knows factors that affect the number and types of organisms an ecosystem can support
 - Benchmark: Knows ways in which organisms interact and depend on one another through food chains and food webs in an ecosystem

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To study the life of a tarantula.
2. To examine the characteristics of a tarantula.
3. To review the habitats, mating habits, and enemies of a tarantula.



BEFORE SHOWING

1. Do you think tarantulas are scary or disgusting? If not, why do you think other people view them this way?
2. How many people would you guess die every year worldwide from tarantula bites?

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Is it ethically acceptable to trap, sell and keep tarantulas as pets?
2. How do tarantulas use hairs to protect themselves?
3. What animals prey on tarantulas? Name two creatures that tarantulas eat.

SUMMARY

Rick West saw his first tarantula at age 14, and its size made him compare it to a Pekinese. It's an observation that would make most people turn and run, but for West, the experience was electrifying.

He travels throughout the Americas, seeking out these giant spiders for study.

Tarantulas have been on this earth for 40 million years, and they have adapted to life in some of the world's harshest environments—like the Sonora Desert in Arizona, where daytime temperatures can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

Although they are lethal predators, sometimes taking on deadly snakes, very few tarantulas bite humans, and nobody has ever died from a tarantula bite.

West argues that arachnophobia is learned, not natural. When he visits daycares and lower-level elementary classes, kids think the spiders are great. Many want to stroke them. At higher levels, though, West says "People break into a sweat."

Tarantulas are growing in popularity as exotic pets. West doesn't think that's right. These are wild, unpredictable creatures. They are venomous; their hairs can cause irritation and bring on asthma attacks. "It's ethically wrong to take these animals out of the environment," he says.

RELATED RESOURCES



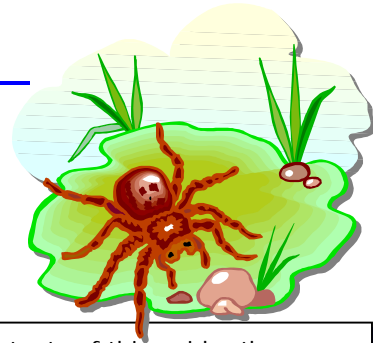
Captioned Media Program

- Hunters in the Grass #2294
- The Spider #2529

World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid-safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.



- **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S TARANTULAS**

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/features/97/tarantulas/burrowtext.html>

Click on the picture of the tarantula to learn about its anatomy, or click on "Species" to see the diversity of tarantulas, or follow its "Life Cycle."

- **THE AMERICAN TARANTULA SOCIETY**

<http://www.atshq.org/>

The ATS considers itself as the largest arachnid society in the world of tarantulas and other orders. Provides articles, photos, links and others.

- **TARANTULAS.COM**

<http://www.tarantulas.com/main.htm>

Search by common or scientific name to get clear pictures of a specific tarantula with a brief description. Also provides links, updates, forums.