

Spooky species: Some scary-looking animals are all fang, no bite

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Vampire bats look pretty scary. Like movie vampires, these bats drink blood -- but not human blood! Photo from: Wikimedia.

The animal kingdom is full of critters that look like something out of a nightmare. Some of them have earned their bad reputations. However, others are far less frightening than they seem. Here are a few species that seem spooky until you get to know them a little better.

Misunderstood Arachnids

Hundreds of spiders fall under the tarantula category. Many of them can grow so big you might have trouble holding them with one hand!

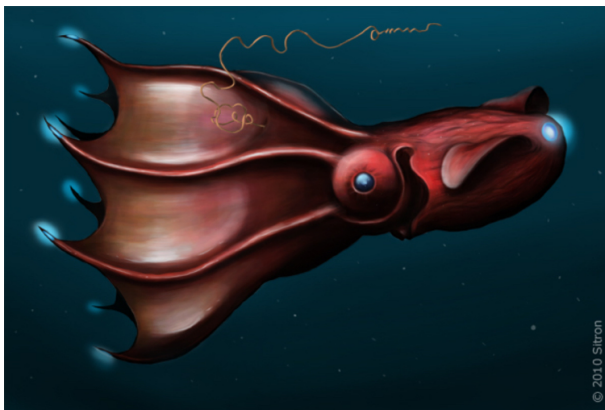
The Goliath birdeater is a perfect example of a misunderstood tarantula. First of all, it rarely eats birds. Also, luckily, tarantulas aren't dangerous to humans. Lots of even freakier-looking arachnids, such as the whip spider, are also pretty harmless. Be careful, though, because some can pinch you a little if they get scared.

Fangs Are For Show

What do vampire bats, vampire squids, vampire squirrels and vampire deer have in common? They're not vampires. Well, most of them are not.

Vampire squids are neither vampires nor squids. They're related to squids and octopuses. But they're actually the last of an ancient group that belongs to neither category. Instead of blood, they eat bits of creatures and junk that sink into the deep sea.

We know less about vampire squirrels, but scientists are pretty sure that they really don't



suck deer blood. The rumors probably started because the fluffy beasts have unusual tufts on their ears. Vampire deer do have fangs. They use them for fighting, not eating, though.

Vampire bats are the only critters in the bunch that definitely drink blood. These Latin American natives seldom go after humans. If one is silly enough to bite you, rabies is a bigger worry than losing blood. Rabies is a deadly disease carried by some wild animals, including bats.

What Lurks Beneath

Scientists who search the bottom of the ocean for new species pull up some strange-looking organisms. But you've got to be weird to survive down there. Maybe you need giant eyes to see in the dark. On the other hand, maybe you can give up eyes entirely. You might even glow!

Even if they could get to shallow water where you swim, most of these deep-sea animals would not be interested in harming you. Take the ghost shark. It looks like someone's idea of a shark puppet for a horror movie. Still, it doesn't attack humans.

Not For Cuddling

Slow lorises seem too adorable to be real. Watch out, though — those cute little arms hide glands full of toxins. When threatened, slow lorises can lick their glands to create a painful bite. Some humans who are particularly sensitive to loris goo will swell up when they are bitten. They may even have trouble breathing.



Given that, you shouldn't ever try to tickle a cute little loris. You're way better off getting cuddly with a hairy tarantula.



