mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “What is the most dangerous animal in the world?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hi, it's Doug! This summer, I was pet-sitting for my daughter's class. This is their classroom pet. His name is Mr. Lizard. He's what's called a bearded dragon. Now, that name sounds really ferocious, and some people, when they first see him, they're a little startled. You can tell he's got these spikes on him, and sharp claws. But bearded dragons aren't dangerous at all. In fact, Mr. Lizard likes to be pet.

Someone named Kiiwa has a question about dangerous animals. Let's give him a call now.

[Video Call]
- Hi, Doug!
- Hi, Kiiwa!
- I have a question for you. What is the most dangerous animal in the world?
- That's a great question.

Before I say anything more, I'll give you some time to come up with your own ideas. What do you think is the most dangerous animal in the world?

Now would be a good time to pause the video and discuss.

Okay. You ready?

Well, maybe you thought of animals like sharks or lions. They've got sharp teeth and they're hunters. Or maybe you thought of animals like snakes or scorpions. They've got venom in their fangs or their stingers. While these animals might be really scary, would you believe me if I told you they're actually not very dangerous?

Here's the thing people have noticed. Very few people in the world actually get hurt by these animals each year. In fact, if we add up all the numbers of people hurt by animals like these, the animals we usually think of as being scary, it doesn't even come close to the number of people hurt by the most dangerous animal in the world.

And that animal is the mosquito!

Seriously! When I first learned that, I couldn't believe it. *Really*, mosquitoes are the most dangerous animal in the world? I mean, come on, mosquitoes bite you, and they make you itch. They might be annoying, but dangerous?

Here's the thing, though. People who live in warm, swampy areas have always noticed that where there are a lot of mosquitoes, it seems like there are a lot of people who get sick. People in these areas would get certain diseases. Today, these diseases go by names like malaria and dengue fever.

For most of history, no one could figure out why people were getting sick with these diseases. But about 100 years ago, scientists discovered an important clue—these diseases would always start with a mosquito bite. What scientists eventually discovered was that some mosquitoes carry germs inside their bodies. When a mosquito sucks the blood out, some of the mosquito's

saliva, or spit, gets into a person's body, so germs that are inside the mosquito are able to get into someone's body.

Even today, many people get sick from these diseases, so sick that they have to go to a hospital to get help from a doctor. In most parts of the world today, like where I live in the United States, these diseases aren't very common, but they are common in other parts of the world, especially in warm tropical places.

It's in these warm tropical places that people have to be very careful. They often hang mosquito nets and spray themselves with mosquito repellent. Scientists are working on even better ways to keep people safe from mosquitoes. Hopefully, one day, not long from now, mosquitoes won't be the most dangerous animal in the world anymore.

So, in summary, mosquitoes may not look very scary, but in some places, they carry germs that can make people extremely sick, which makes mosquitoes the most dangerous animal in the world—more dangerous to people than sharks, lions, *and* snakes.

That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Kiiwa, for asking it!