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Top Predators



TREASURE **BAY**

Introduction

Top Predators

We Both Read books are perfect to read with a buddy—or to read by yourself! If you are reading the book alone, you can read it like any other book. If you are reading with another person, you can take turns reading aloud. When taking turns, it's usually a good idea



for the reader with more experience to read the more difficult parts, marked with a blue dot ●. The reader with somewhat less experience can read the parts marked with a red star ★.

Sharing the reading of a book can be a lot of fun, and reading aloud is a great way to improve fluency and expression. If you are reading with someone else, you might also



want to take the time to talk about what you are reading and what else you would like to know about these top predators. After reading with someone else, you might even want to experience reading the entire book on your own.

Top Predators

A We Both Read® Chapter Book
Level 3

Blue dot text—Guided Reading Level: S

Red star text—Guided Reading Level: Q

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A large brown bear stands on a rocky outcrop in a forest. The bear is the central focus, looking directly at the camera. The background is a dense forest of evergreen trees under a slightly overcast sky. The bear's fur is thick and brown, and its large paws are visible on the rocks.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	
Top Predators	2
Chapter 2	
How to Be a Top Predator	6
Chapter 3	
Predators on Land	16
Chapter 4	
Birds of Prey.....	22
Chapter 5	
Aquatic Predators.....	28
Chapter 6	
The Only Enemy: Humans.....	34
Glossary	42
Questions to Ask After Reading	43



Owl



Great white shark

- A predator is any animal that hunts down, kills, and eats other animals. Many predators appear frightening with their big teeth, sharp claws, and powerful jaws.

There are many species of predators in the animal kingdom, and many of them are also prey. For example, rats eat grasshoppers, but a rat may then be hunted, killed, and eaten by a fox. The fox may then become dinner for a bear. Bears, however, are not preyed upon by any other animal. This classifies them as a top predator. A top predator is one that, when full-grown and healthy, is not hunted by any other animal in their natural **environment**.



Gray wolf



Grizzly bear



Lion



Environment is extremely important in determining a top predator's success. A lion would not last long in the Arctic cold while a polar bear is not built to thrive on the plains of Africa. A killer whale may rule in the ocean but would not survive in the trees of a tropical rain forest.

There can, however, be more than one top predator in a specific environment. For example, sperm whales and killer whales are both excellent hunters with no natural enemies in the same ocean waters. Bobcats and wolves are both on top in the forests of the United States.



Killer whale

- The hunting and eating of other animals may seem cruel, but predators play an extremely important role in keeping animal populations in balance to maintain a healthy ecosystem.

A simple way to explain an ecosystem is through the food chain.

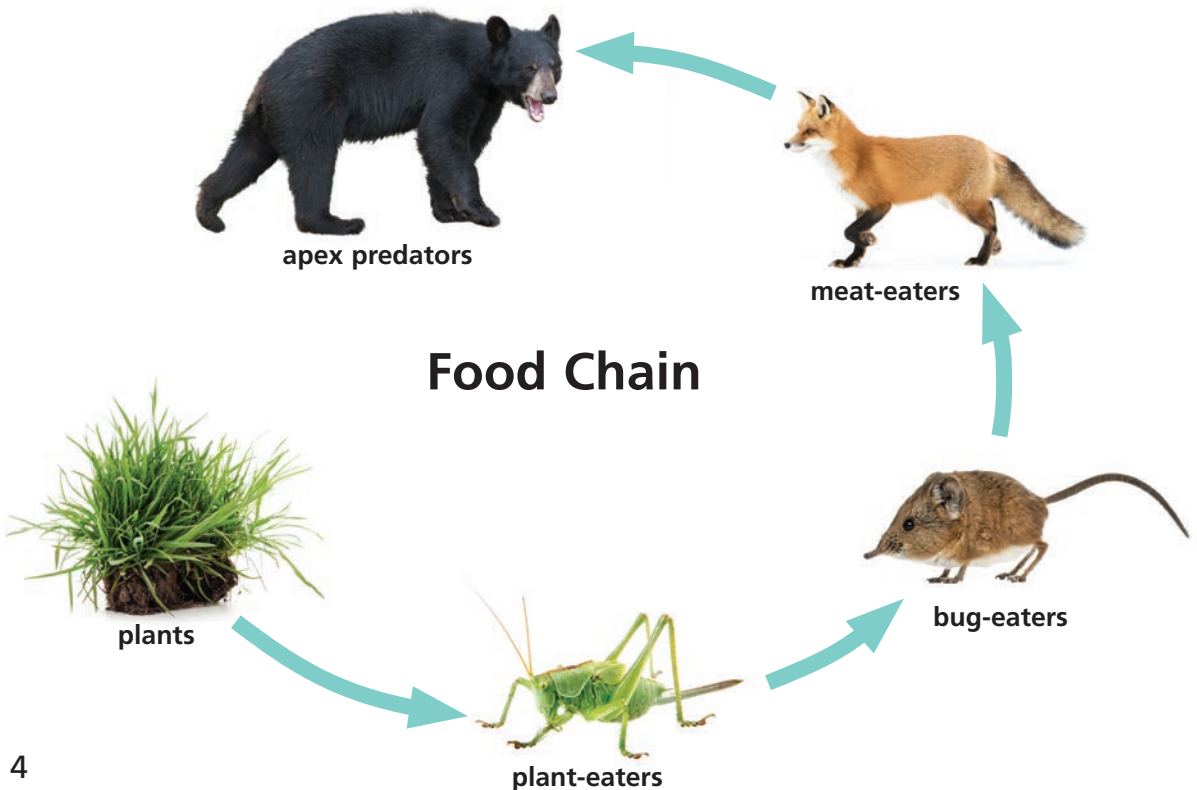
The first link in the food chain is plants.

The next link is the animals that only consume plants, such as giraffes, deer, and bugs.

Predators, or meat-eaters, are next in the chain.

These meat-eaters may then be eaten by other meat-eaters.

The animals at the very top of the food chain are called **apex** predators. They have no natural enemies. Their population is controlled through competition for resources and the natural aging process.





Leopard



Baboons

★ The health of an ecosystem requires a delicate balance. **Apex** predators are an essential part of that balance. When an apex predator is removed, serious problems may occur.

When leopards in parts of Africa were almost wiped out, the baboon population exploded. The baboons attacked livestock, damaged crops, and spread parasites to humans.

Sea otters were once almost wiped out by hunters. Otters eat sea urchins. Without otters, urchins thrived. The urchins began to destroy ocean kelp forests. Kelp forests are an important habitat for many sea animals. Fortunately, people are now helping otters make a comeback.



Sea otter



Kelp forest



Malayan tiger



Siberian tiger

- Top predators earn their position in nature in many ways. One quality found in many apex hunters is stealth, which is the ability to sneak up quietly on your prey before going in for the kill.

Cats are renowned for their stealth, and tigers are true masters. Their excellent vision and hearing allow them to hunt in low light when their striped coat provides a form of camouflage in the shadows. They silently stalk an unsuspecting victim, then pounce on its back, biting its neck and often breaking its spinal cord.

Spiders may be small compared to other apex predators, but when it comes to being sneaky, the trapdoor spider is one of the best. These spiders live in underground **burrows**.



Trapdoor spider



Trapdoor spider



Barn owl

★ These spiders build a hinged cover on top of their **burrow**. They wait for prey to walk past. Then they pop up out of the “trapdoor,” grab the prey, and bite. The spider’s fangs deliver venom that turns the prey’s insides into mush, which the spider then eats.

Owls are another animal that uses stealth, swooping quietly down on victims from the sky. With special feathers that absorb much of the noise of flight, they can fly just inches from their prey with barely a sound. Once an owl has its prey in its powerful claws there is no escape.



Eurasian eagle-owl foot



Little owl



Cheetah

- Speed is another advantage for some predators. Cheetahs have been known to run at speeds up to 75 miles an hour—faster than cars are allowed to go on most highways. However, cheetahs can only run at this **exceptional** speed in short bursts, so stealth must also be used. A cheetah will creep up slowly on its prey before taking chase and pouncing.

The fastest predatory animal ever recorded is the peregrine falcon. They have been clocked reaching speeds of 240 miles per hour while diving for prey—faster than a small airplane! Falcons have an aerodynamic torso that reduces the drag from air moving past at high speeds. Their specially pointed wings can beat up to four times per second while they are in flight.

Peregrine falcon





Bald eagle

★ Many apex predators also have excellent eyes. Eagles can spot prey up to two miles away. But they do not see as well in the dark.

Owls, on the other hand, can see any time of the day or night! Great eyes plus their ability to fly silently makes them **exceptional** hunters. Mice and other prey on the ground never know they're coming until it's too late.



Tawny owl