

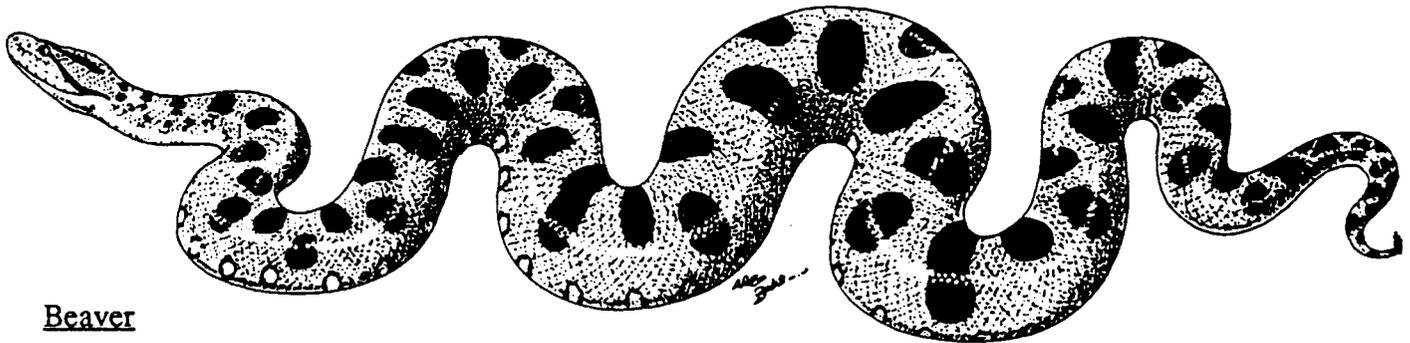
Mermaids and Manatees

Wildlife has inspired myths and art for centuries. For years wondrous and terrifying accounts of water-dwelling creatures were brought back by sailors and early explorers. Many of these accounts were true; but due to the imagination of the listeners, mermaids, sea serpents, and monsters “too terrible to mention” were born. Aquatic WILD’s “Mermaids and Manatees” outlines how students describe aquatic animals using a narrative style of writing. This description is then the basis for a drawing or painting done by classmates.

We’ve provided a list of animals and brief narratives you might want to use for your class. This should be a fun activity in which students learn to distinguish between mythical and real wildlife, and offer examples of how wild animals can be the foundation of mythical creatures found in stories and art. We hope you can easily find actual photos to compare with the students drawings.

Anaconda

This creature is 20 to 30 feet long, sometimes even longer. It prefers to live in swamps and marshes. It swims in the water but has to crawl on the land since it has no arms and legs. It has very sharp teeth curving toward the back of the mouth which help hold its prey. It can eat very large things without chewing them. Dinner is swallowed whole, even if it is four times as large as the creature’s head! It eats birds and small mammals, and even larger pigs and goats. It has even been known to eat caimans, a relative of the alligator that is found where it lives! It has no hair, no eyelids, but does have a long, thin tail.

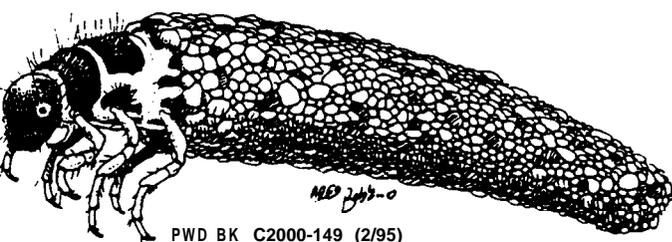


Beaver

Since it spends a lot of time in the water, this creature has webbed feet for fast swimming. It is covered by a thick furry coat, except for the tail, which is broad, flat, and scaled. When it is scared, it will slap the water with its tail. Near the top of the head are two very small eyes, and in its mouth are two very long teeth used for chopping down trees. The tree is used for food for the creature, then the trunk and remaining branches are built into a home.



Caddisfly

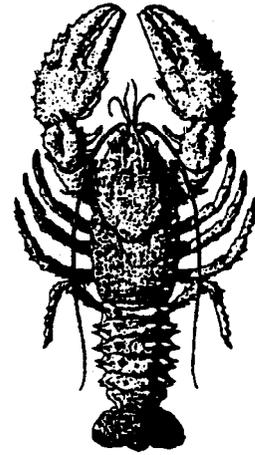


PWD BK C2000-149 (2/95)

When young, this is a worm-like creature that protects itself by building a protective covering for its soft body out of rocks. It glues these together with saliva, leaving only its head sticking out of the top. It spends the first half of its life in this underwater tube, then turns into an adult form. At this point it leaves the water and has large brown wings as long as the body, and three times as wide.

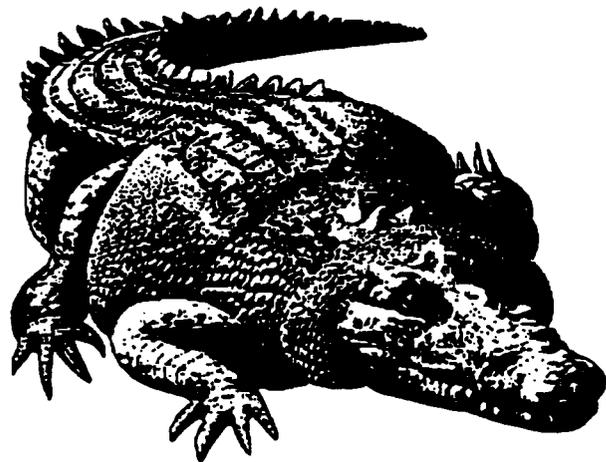
Crayfish/Lobster

This hard-shelled animal walks on six legs which all have pinchers on the end. It eats other animals, using two large pinchers for holding what it eats. Two very small arms are used like jaws. The hard outer covering has spines on the back to protect it from predators. A female carries clusters of eggs on her belly until they hatch. The eyes are small and black and sit on stalks so it can see better and in more directions. It spends most of its time walking on the bottom of its aquatic home, and is able to swim backwards very quickly when danger approaches.

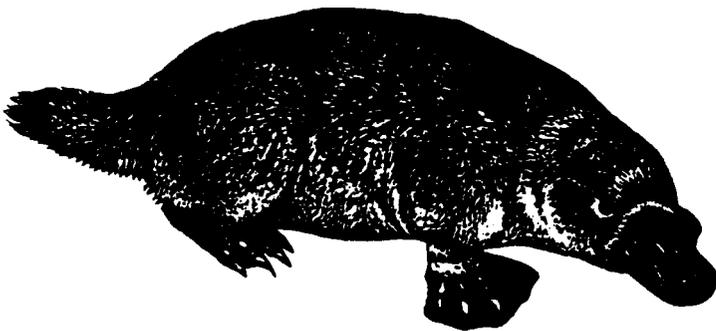


Crocodiles

Imagine a beast with a long, slender nose, rounded at the tip, and a wide mouth with 25 to 30 sharp, peg-like, interlocking teeth. It has no fur, a long, but stout, body and long tail; and hard, bony plates on its back to protect it. Its eyes, ears, and nostrils sit rather high on the head. This allows the creature to breathe, see, and hear while it's swimming across the surface of the water. It prefers to eat fish, aquatic birds, turtles, and mammals, but has been known to kill and eat humans. When a prey item is killed that is too large to eat at one sitting, it is wedged under a submerged log or rock for a future meal. There have been reports of this creature reaching lengths of 20 feet and weights of 3,000 pounds. The female builds a nest from decaying vegetation in which she lays her eggs.



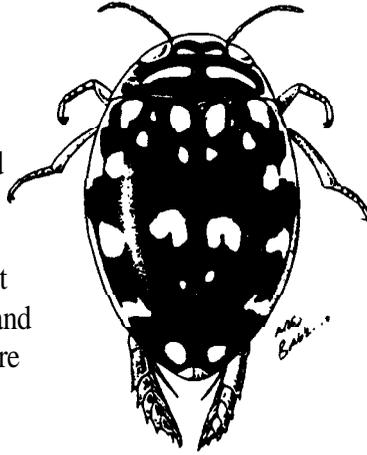
Duckbilled Platypus



A fur-covered creature that spends much of its time in the water. It has a bill much like a duck that is very sensitive and is used for finding things to eat in the mud. It has webbed feet to help it swim better, with poisonous spines on them for defending itself. It lays eggs like a bird, but nurses its young like a mammal. It lives in a burrow dug in the bank of a river or lake.

Dytiscid Beetle

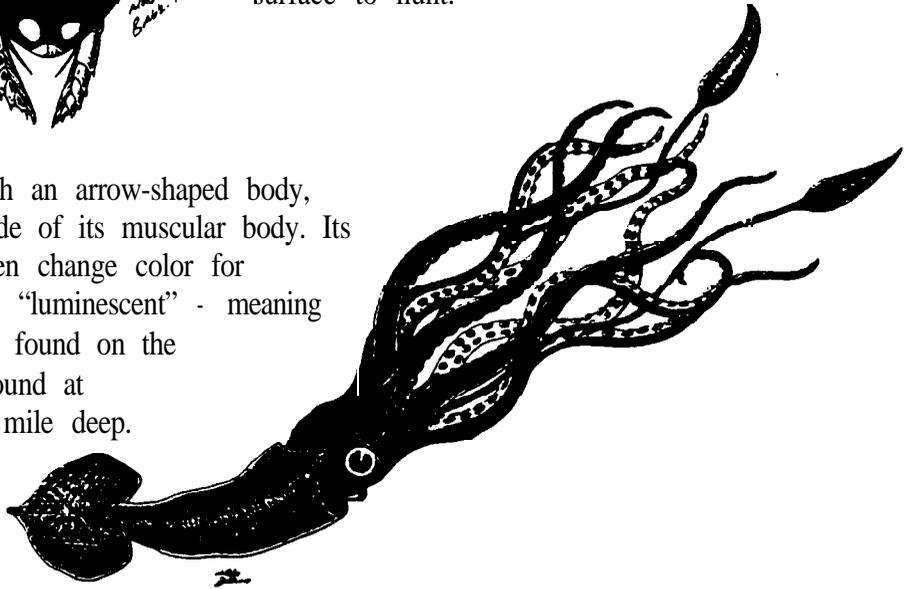
They live underwater with a hard shell covering and have huge paddle-like back feet to propel them quickly through the water. Their front legs are clawed for catching and holding prey animals. They are



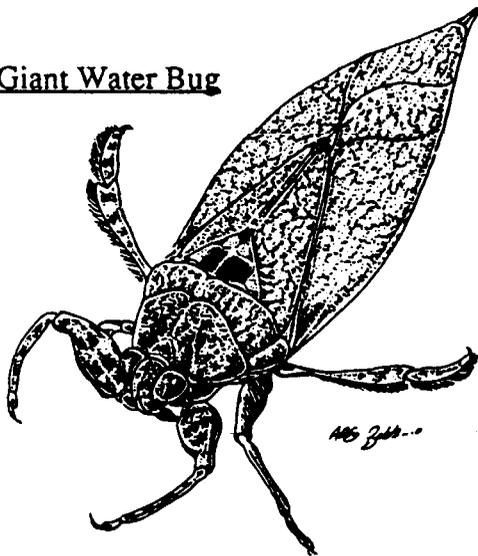
known as a "Top Predator" in the areas where they are found and have been recorded as eating prey items four times their size. These animals carry their air supply with them as they dive beneath the surface to hunt.

Giant Squid

A very large (up to 50 feet) creature with an arrow-shaped body, ten arms, and two eyes - one on each side of its muscular body. Its glistening skin can vary in color (can even change color for camouflage) but is most noted for being "luminescent" - meaning it shines in the dark. It can sometimes be found on the ocean's surface at night, but is usually found at greater depths, sometimes as much as a mile deep.



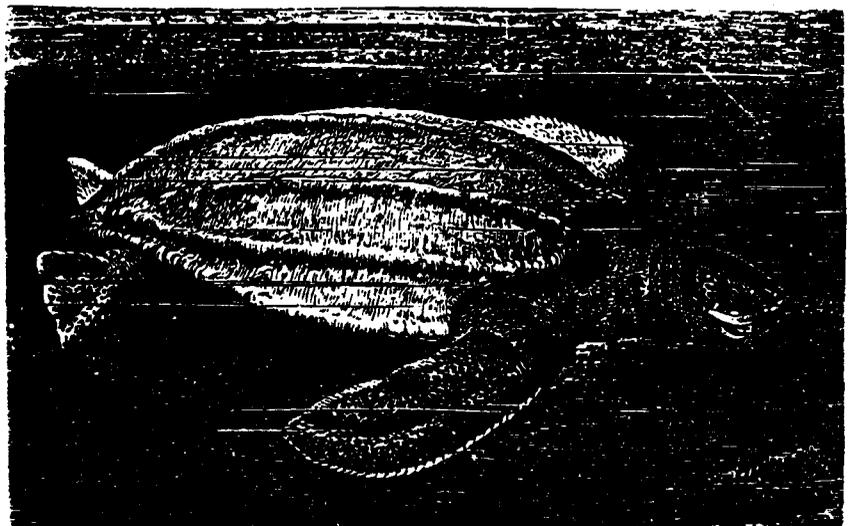
Giant Water Bug



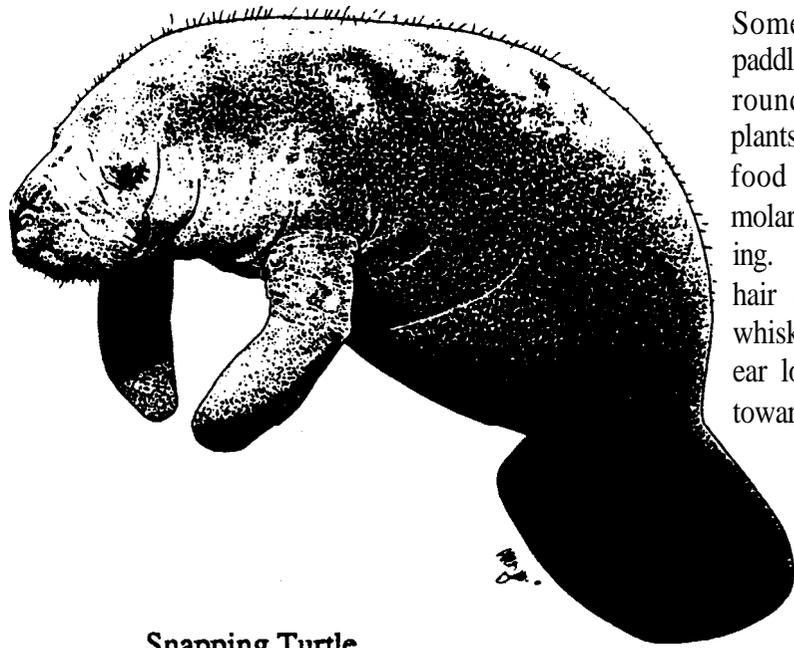
This creature lives underwater most of the time, but when food supplies run low, it flies with large, papery wings to a new area. When it catches a prey item with its long sickle-like front legs, it sticks its pointed, tube-shaped snout into the body and injects an enzyme which dissolves the animal's insides. Once dissolved, the insides are sucked up with the straw-like snout, leaving only the shell or skin which is discarded.

Leatherback Sea Turtle

An oval-shaped creature with a thick, leather-like outer covering for protection, through which the head, four wing-like flippers, and tail are extended when they swim. The length of the body is five to seven feet long, but the span of the flippers can be as wide as nine feet! This is important, since it sometimes migrates as far as 2,000 miles in one season. It can weigh up to 1,000 pounds, so must swim a lot to find enough of its favorite food item - jellyfish!



Manatees



Somewhat larger than a big human, this creature has paddle-like front limbs and a tail fin that is flat, wide, and rounded toward the end. It is herbivorous (eats only plants), with a wide flexible upper lip that is used to take food into the mouth. Its teeth are like a human's back molars, made for grinding plant material before swallowing. It has no neck to speak of, is very round and fat, has hair scattered thinly over its entire body, with short, stiff whiskers on its face. It has small, wide-set eyes, and no ear lobes. It mates for life and has a very gentle disposition towards members of its own species and other animals.

Snapping Turtle

A flat, oval-shaped creature, that may weigh over 300 pounds. It has fleshy spikes on its chin and neck. The heavily armored plate on its back has three tall, jagged ridges. Algae grows on its back and helps to camouflage (hide) this animal. It has a large muscular head, a thick neck, and small eyes with a star-like design around each pupil. The jaws are powerful and beak-like and inside the mouth is a small pink piece of flesh which can be wiggled like a worm to attract fish which make up most of this animals diet.



Starfish

A creature with five evenly spaced appendages (arms), with an eye on the tip of each, and to which are attached over 40,000 feet! Each foot has a suction cup on the bottom, used for holding on to rocks and cliffs, and prying open its prey's (food item) shelter. Once the shelter is open, this creature secretes its digestive juices to begin the process of digestion. It then "everts" its stomach (puts it outside its body) into the victim's shelter, and swallows the partially digested food!

