

## Killer spiders invade Sydney!

Never mind crocodiles and sharks, it is killer funnel-web spiders that you have to look out for in Sydney, Australia. Recently several residents were bitten by a plague of these poisonous arachnids\*. The spiders are a real menace at this time of the year, especially for Sydneysiders\*. The backyard spider, if it bites can kill you in the space of two hours - so meeting one is best avoided.

Insect experts warned that the city was being invaded by funnel-webs, considered one of the world's most aggressive and poisonous spiders. Residents have the chance to drop off any captured spiders at a reptile park north of Sydney. Here they will be milked of their venom to make antidote. So far, the park has received more than 40 males in recent weeks. Males are deadlier than females.

So why has this plague happened? It is due to the lengthy dry period, followed by unseasonal downpours and high humidity over the Christmas break. "We've had a long spell of very warm weather combined with rain," said Mary Rayner, General Manager of the Australian Reptile Park. She added, "They are starting to come in thick and fast."

The killer spiders have also mushroomed in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. Rex Gilroy who runs a dangerous spiders hotline told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "I think climate change might have something to do with it. This season there's more moisture and coolness, and the spiders have been able to breed up...The numbers are definitely up from the previous year, and I think it's not going to get any better."

Most spiders will scuttle away when disturbed. Funnel-webs though – which can grow up to two inches long – may rear up and bare their fangs. They make burrows in moist, dark places, such as outdoor laundries, garden sheds, and shrubberies. Parents have been warned to keep an eye on their young children. "People should always shake their shoes, never leave washing on the ground or out overnight, and really be careful around laundries and other dark, damp places," said Ms Rayner.

**Category: Australia / Sydney / Spiders**  
**Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate**

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## Killer spiders invade Sydney! – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Last year a two-year-old boy had to be flown to hospital after being bitten by a funnel-web which had crawled into his gumboot\*. He displayed the classic symptoms, including vomiting, convulsions and breathlessness, but recovered after being given the anti-venom.

Over the past 100 years 13 people have died as a result of bites from funnel-webs but none since 1981 when an anti-venom was developed. Experts warn though to be extra cautious! One species, the paperbark funnel-web, has a bite so lethal that one victim required 17 ampules of anti-venom.

Funnel-web spiders are most active in the breeding season, which is normally in February, but weather conditions can bring them out earlier. They are found in eastern Australia. It is said they can leap up to 18 inches and their fangs can penetrate soft shoes and fingernails. Nice! (**\*see p8**)

## EXERCISES

**1. Spiders:** Are you afraid of spiders? Do you like spiders? Name three different insects. What do you know about them? Go round the room swapping details.

**2. Geography: Australia:** Where is Australia? Where is Sydney? What seas surround it? Draw a map on the board then look on Google maps.

**3. Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

**4. Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

**5. The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?
- c) Would you like meet a funnel-web spider?

**6. Let's think!** Think of three insects and creepy crawlies you like. Then add three you dislike. Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these?

Three insects etc...you like	Three insects etc...you dislike
1	1
2	2
3	3

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7. **Let's compare!** In pairs. Look at the list below of different insects and creepy crawlies. What do you know about **each** of them? Where and when will you find these insects and creepy crawlies? (*You might like to look on the internet to see some pictures of these. Maybe print some pictures out of these*)

1	Flies	11	Wasps
2	Fleas	12	Woodlice
3	Bluebottles	13	Daddy Long Legs
4	Mosquitoes	14	Silverfish
5	Beetles	15	Flying ants
6	Earwigs	16	Moths
7	Ants	17	Cockroaches
8	Bees	18	Spiders
9	Grasshoppers	19	Centipedes
10	Ladybirds	20	Crickets

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

8. **Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

**Student A**

- 1) What has invaded Sydney?
- 2) Why has this plague happened?
- 3) Name the newspaper.
- 4) Where else have the spiders mushroomed?
- 5) How big is a funnel-web spider?

**Student B**

- 1) Where are these spiders found?
- 2) How far can these spiders leap?
- 3) What can their fangs penetrate?
- 4) What happened in 1981? Where? Concerning what?
- 5) Following a bite what are the classic symptoms?

9. **Let's chat!** In pairs. One of you rings your fellow student who is in another country on Skype! Chat about killer spiders in Sydney and why you are interested in them? *5-minutes.*

10. **Let's debate:** In pairs. Students A think spiders are quite harmless. You have a dangerous spider as a pet. Students B think otherwise. Explain why.

11. **Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **Spiders.** (Imagine!) Your e-mail can be read out in class.

12. **Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) I love \_\_\_\_\_
- b) I dislike \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Spiders are \_\_\_\_\_

## DISCUSSION

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) What creepy crawlies do you dislike?
- 3) What creepy crawlies do you tolerate?
- 4) Have any insects or creepy crawlies ever bitten you?
- 5) What do you think of the killer spiders in Sydney?
- 6) Would you like to be a spider in another life?
- 7) Have you ever met a dangerous insect or creepy crawly?
- 8) How does global warming affect plagues of insects?
- 9) What and where was the biggest spider you have met?
- 10) Have you ever been poisoned by a spider?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) Have you ever been stung by a bee or wasp?
- 3) Do you like to swat flies?
- 4) Have you ever been bitten by an ant?
- 5) Has your *flat/house* ever been invaded by insects? Which? When?
- 6) What do you think of Daddy Long Legs?
- 7) Have you ever suffered as a result of a mosquito bite? If yes, how?
- 8) Why are insects and creepy crawlies actually so important?
- 9) If you were to be an insect or creepy crawly which would you choose to be and why?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

## SPEAKING

### Let's brainstorm! Creepy crawlies

*Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1*

Brainstorm some ideas about **creepy crawlies**. Choose a spokesperson who can present your ideas to the class at the end of your preparation. Present it visually or use the board etc... Try to be imaginative!

- 1) Name five movies which feature creepy crawlies and insects
- 2) Between you, name five creepy crawlies you dislike
- 3) Name five other creepy crawlies or insects not listed on page 3
- 4) Identify some dangerous insects or creepy crawlies
- 5) What happens if you are bitten? Give three examples

The teacher can moderate the session.

## GAP FILL: READING

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

### Killer spiders invade Sydney!

Never mind \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, it is killer funnel-web \_\_\_\_\_ that you have to look out for in Sydney, Australia. Recently several residents were bitten by a plague of these poisonous arachnids. The spiders are a real menace at this time of the year, especially for Sydneysiders. The \_\_\_\_\_ spider, if it bites can kill you in the space of two hours - so meeting one is best avoided.

Insect experts warned that the city was being invaded by funnel-webs, considered one of the world's most \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ spiders. Residents have the chance to drop off any captured spiders at a reptile park north of Sydney. Here they will be milked of their \_\_\_\_\_ to make antidote. So far, the park has received more than 40 males in recent weeks. Males are \_\_\_\_\_ than females.

So why has this \_\_\_\_\_ happened? It is due to the lengthy dry period, followed by unseasonal \_\_\_\_\_ and high \_\_\_\_\_ over the Christmas break. "We've had a long spell of very warm weather combined with rain," said Mary Rayner, general Manager of the Australian Reptile Park. She added, "They are starting to come in thick and fast."

The killer spiders have also mushroomed in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. Rex Gilroy who runs a dangerous spider's hotline told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "I think climate change might have something to do with it. This \_\_\_\_\_ there's more moisture and coolness, and the spiders have been able to breed up...The numbers are definitely up from the previous year, and I think it's not going to get any better."

Most spiders will \_\_\_\_\_ away when disturbed. Funnel-webs though – which can grow up to two inches long – may rear up and bare their \_\_\_\_\_. They make \_\_\_\_\_ in moist, dark places, such as outdoor laundries, garden sheds, and \_\_\_\_\_. Parents have been warned to keep an eye on their young children.

*sharks*

*spiders*

*poisonous*

*venom*

*deadlier*

*backyard*

*aggressive*

*crocodiles*

*scuttle*

*humidity*

*plague*

*shrubberies*

*fangs*

*downpours*

*burrows*

*season*

## GAP FILL: LISTENING

*Listen and fill in the spaces.*

### Killer spiders invade Sydney!

Never mind \_\_\_\_\_, it is killer funnel-web spiders that you have to look out for in Sydney, Australia. Recently several residents were bitten \_\_\_\_\_ these poisonous arachnids. The spiders are a real menace at this time of the year, especially for Sydneysiders. The backyard spider, \_\_\_\_\_ you in the space of two hours - so meeting one is best avoided.

Insect experts warned that the city \_\_\_\_\_ funnel-webs, considered one of the world's most aggressive and poisonous spiders. Residents have the chance to drop off any captured spiders at a reptile park north of Sydney. Here they will be milked of \_\_\_\_\_ antidote. So far, the park has received more than 40 males in recent weeks. Males are \_\_\_\_\_.

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## GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

### Killer spiders invade Sydney!

Never mind crocodiles and sharks, (1)\_\_\_ is killer funnel-web spiders that you have to look out for in Sydney, Australia. Recently several residents were bitten (2)\_\_\_ a plague of these poisonous arachnids. The spiders are a real menace at this time of the year, especially for Sydneysiders. The backyard spider, if it bites can kill (3)\_\_\_ in the space of two hours – (4)\_\_\_ meeting one is best avoided.

Insect experts warned that the city was being invaded by funnel-webs, considered one of the world's most aggressive (5)\_\_\_ poisonous spiders. Residents have the chance to drop off any captured spiders at (6)\_\_\_ reptile park north of Sydney. Here they will be milked (7)\_\_\_ their venom to make antidote. So far, (8)\_\_\_ park has received more than 40 males in recent weeks. Males are deadlier than females.

So why has (1)\_\_\_ plague happened? It is due to the lengthy dry period, followed by unseasonal downpours and high humidity over the Christmas break. "We've had a long spell of (2)\_\_\_ warm weather combined with rain," said Mary Rayner, general Manager of the Australian Reptile Park. She added, "They are starting to come in thick and fast."

The killer spiders have (3)\_\_\_ mushroomed in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. Rex Gilroy who runs a dangerous spider's hotline told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "I think climate change (4)\_\_\_ have something to do with it. This season there's more moisture and coolness, and the spiders have been able to breed up...The numbers are definitely up from the previous year, and I think it's not going to get any better."

Most spiders will scuttle away (5)\_\_\_ disturbed. Funnel-webs though – (6)\_\_\_ can grow up to two inches long – may rear up and bare their fangs. They make burrows in moist, dark places, (7)\_\_\_ outdoor laundries, garden sheds, and shrubberies. Parents have been warned to keep an eye on (8)\_\_\_ young children.

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## SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	unseasonal	11	breathlessness
2	venom	12	crocodiles
3	convulsions	13	Sydney
4	penetrate	14	lethal
5	symptoms	15	menace
6	Australia	16	mushroomed
7	aggressive	17	laundries
8	reptile	18	shrubberies
9	poisonous	19	scuttle
10	arachnids	20	vomiting

**Note:** From p1 and p2

Arachnids - any of various arthropods of the class Arachnida, such as spiders, scorpions, mites, and ticks. Arthropods are characterised by four pairs of segmented legs and a body that is divided into two regions, the cephalothorax and the abdomen.

Sydneysiders – Inhabitants of Sydney are called *Sydneysiders*, comprising a cosmopolitan and international population of people from many places around the world.

"Sydneysider" is the term used to describe one born in Sydney, capital of the Australian state of New South Wales, or one who regards Sydney his home.

Gumboots – another name for Wellington boots

### ANSWERS

**GAP FILL:** Killer spiders invade Sydney! Never mind **crocodiles** and **sharks**, it is killer funnel-web **spiders** that you have to look out for in Sydney, Australia. Recently several residents were bitten by a plague of these poisonous arachnids. The spiders are a real menace at this time of the year, especially for Sydneysiders. The **backyard** spider, if it bites can kill you in the space of two hours - so meeting one is best avoided. Insect experts warned that the city was being invaded by funnel-webs, considered one of the world's most **aggressive** and **poisonous** spiders. Residents have the chance to drop off any captured spiders at a reptile park north of Sydney. Here they will be milked of their **venom** to make antidote. So far, the park has received more than 40 males in recent weeks. Males are **deadlier** than females.

So why has this **plague** happened? It is due to the lengthy dry period, followed by unseasonal **downpours** and high **humidity** over the Christmas break. "We've had a long spell of very warm weather combined with rain," said Mary Rayner, general Manager of the Australian Reptile Park. She added, "They are starting to come in thick and fast." The killer spiders have also mushroomed in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. Rex Gilroy who runs a dangerous spider's hotline told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "I think climate change might have something to do with it. This **season** there's more moisture and coolness, and the spiders have been able to breed up...The numbers are definitely up from the previous year, and I think it's not going to get any better." Most spiders will **scuttle** away when disturbed. Funnel-webs though – which can grow up to two inches long – may rear up and bare their **fangs**. They make **burrows** in moist, dark places, such as outdoor laundries, garden sheds, and **shrubberies**. Parents have been warned to keep an eye on their young children.

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