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Tarantula!

Written by Terri Patterson

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Tarantula!



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Baboon spider

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Introduction

What's huge and hairy, and has fangs that can kill? It's the biggest spider in the world—the tarantula!



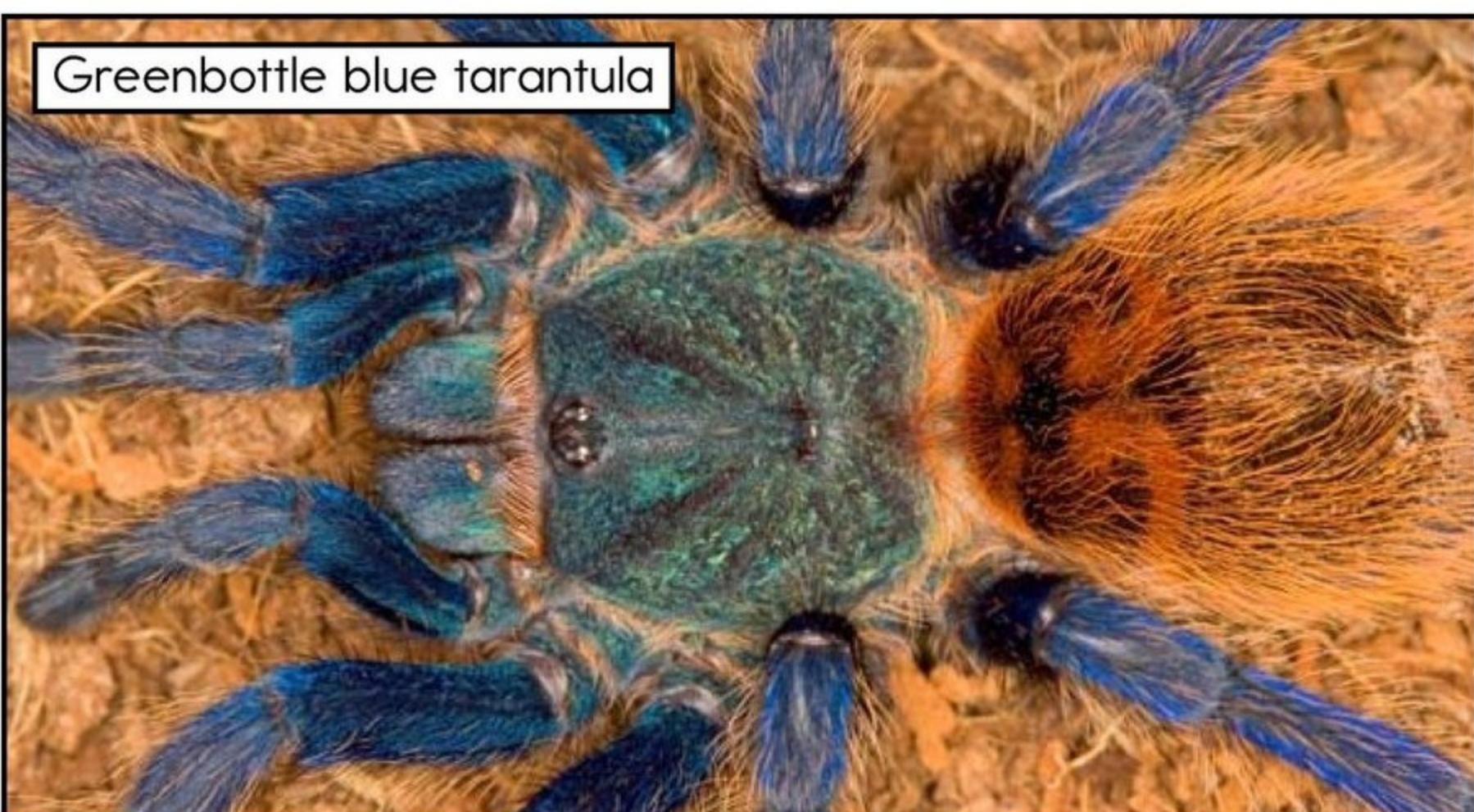
Do You Know?

There are at least eight hundred different kinds of tarantulas. The biggest kind can grow up to 12 inches (30 cm) long!

Where Tarantulas Live

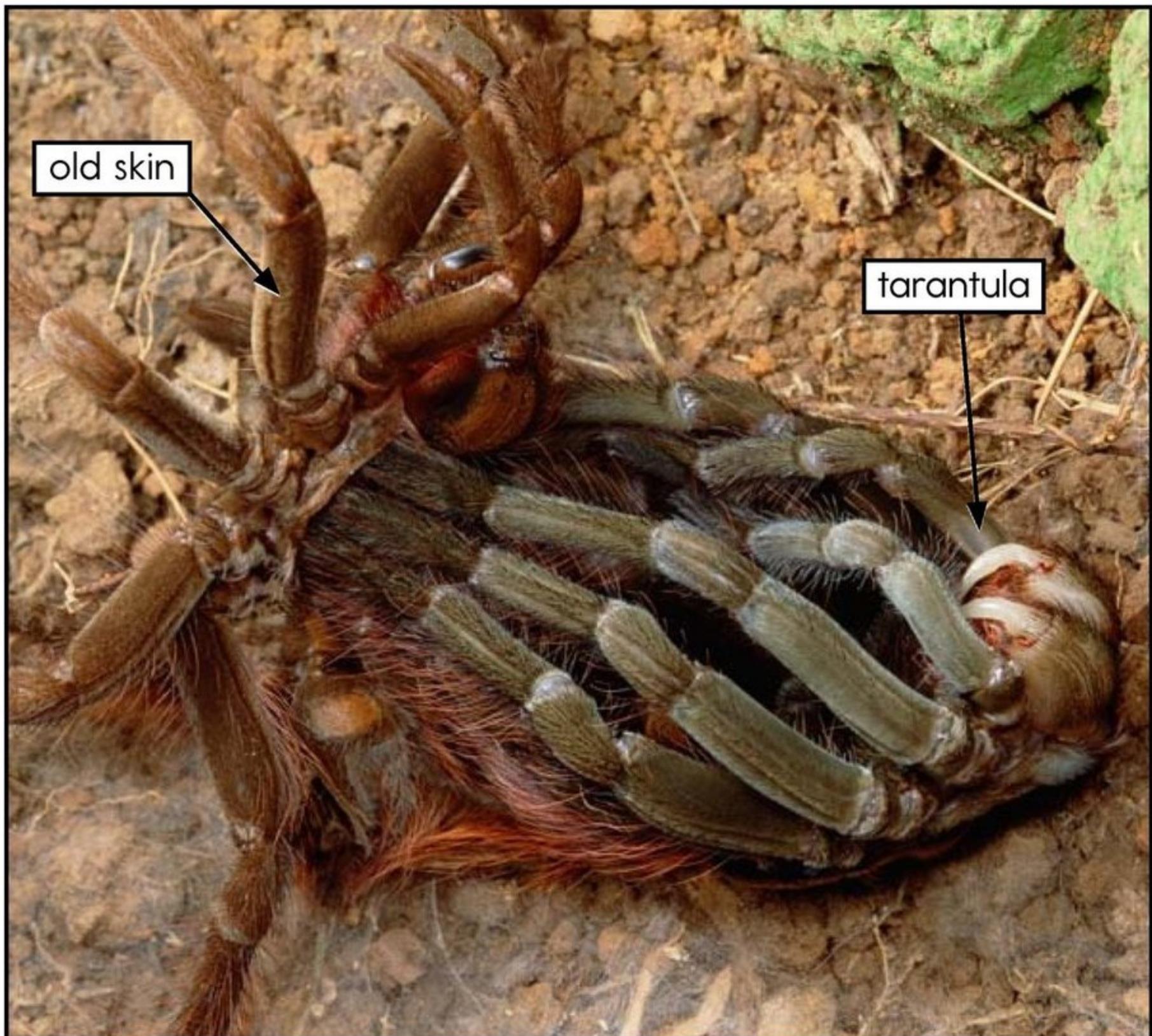
Tarantulas live in warm places around the world. Many live in forests, and others live in deserts. More than fifty kinds of tarantulas live in the United States.

Some tarantulas live in holes in the ground. Others live under logs or in trees.



Do You Know?

Some tarantulas are black or brown, but many others are colorful. They may be red, orange, yellow, pink, blue, purple, or other colors. Some have colorful stripes or other markings on their legs or bodies.



This Ecuadorian brown velvet tarantula is *molting*, or pushing out of its old skin.

Hard, Hairy Bodies

Like insects and other spiders, tarantulas have a hard covering on their body. As they grow, the covering gets too tight and splits down the middle. After a tarantula pushes out of the old skin, its new skin gets hard.



This desert blond tarantula has a bald patch where it kicked off some stiff hairs to sting an enemy. The hairs will grow back again after the tarantula molts.



A tarantula is covered with hairs. The hairs **sense** heat, cold, and things that move. Other hairs near its mouth help a tarantula taste and smell. Stiff hairs with points grow on its stomach and back. A tarantula can sting enemies with these hairs.

The legs of a tarantula have little claws with hairs. The hairs help the tarantula hold on when it climbs.

Two little arms near its mouth have sharp parts. The tarantula holds and cuts food with them.

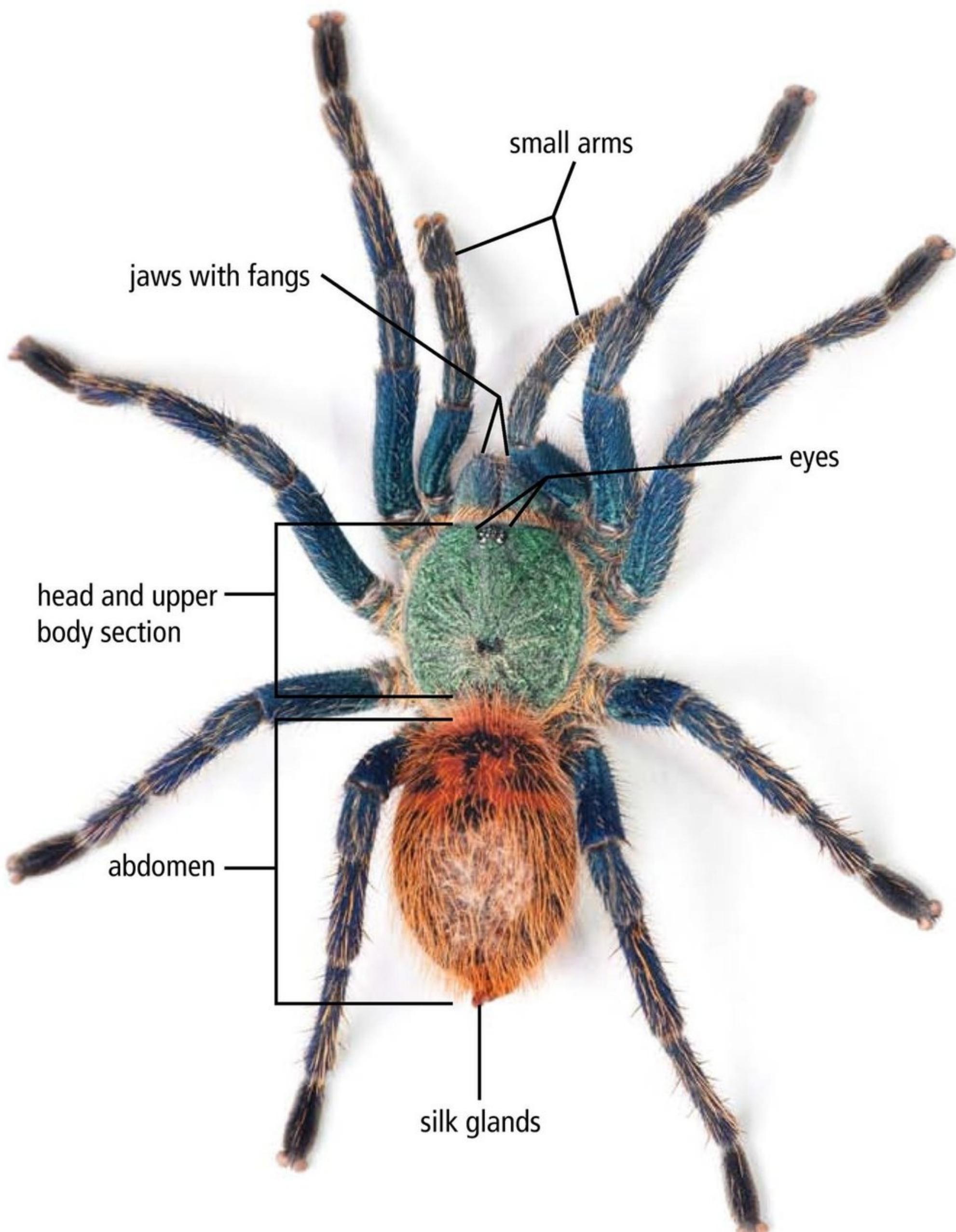
Do You Know?

Tarantulas have eight eyes—two big ones and six small ones. Even with eight eyes, they cannot see very well. They only see light, dark, and movement.



Do You Know?

Tarantulas do not weave webs, but they make silk. Tarantulas that live in holes underground cover the walls with silk. Tarantulas that live in trees use silk to make "tents" or tunnels.





A grasshopper is a delicious meal for a Mexican red-leg tarantula.

Eating and Being Eaten

Tarantulas rest during the day and come out at night to hunt. They eat insects, frogs, lizards, bats, mice, and small snakes. They also eat spiders—even other tarantulas.



A tarantula stabs a grasshopper with its fangs.

To catch **prey**, a tarantula sits very still and waits. When an animal comes near, the tarantula jumps and jabs its fangs into it. **Venom** shoots into the animal and makes it stop moving.

The tarantula drags the animal back home. It uses its jaws and little arms to cut up the animal. It spits juices onto the pieces, which turn to mush. Then the tarantula sucks up a tasty meal.

Do You Know?

Tarantula fangs can measure up to one-half inch (more than 1 cm) long. Tarantula venom is not usually deadly to humans, but a tarantula bite can hurt a lot and get infected. If you are allergic to the venom, it can be deadly.





A tarantula hawk gets ready to attack a tarantula.

You might think tarantulas are too big to be hunted. Not true! The tarantula hawk—a big wasp—hunts tarantulas as food for its young. A female wasp stings a tarantula, which then stops moving. The wasp lays one egg on the tarantula's body. When the young insect comes out, it feeds on the tarantula.

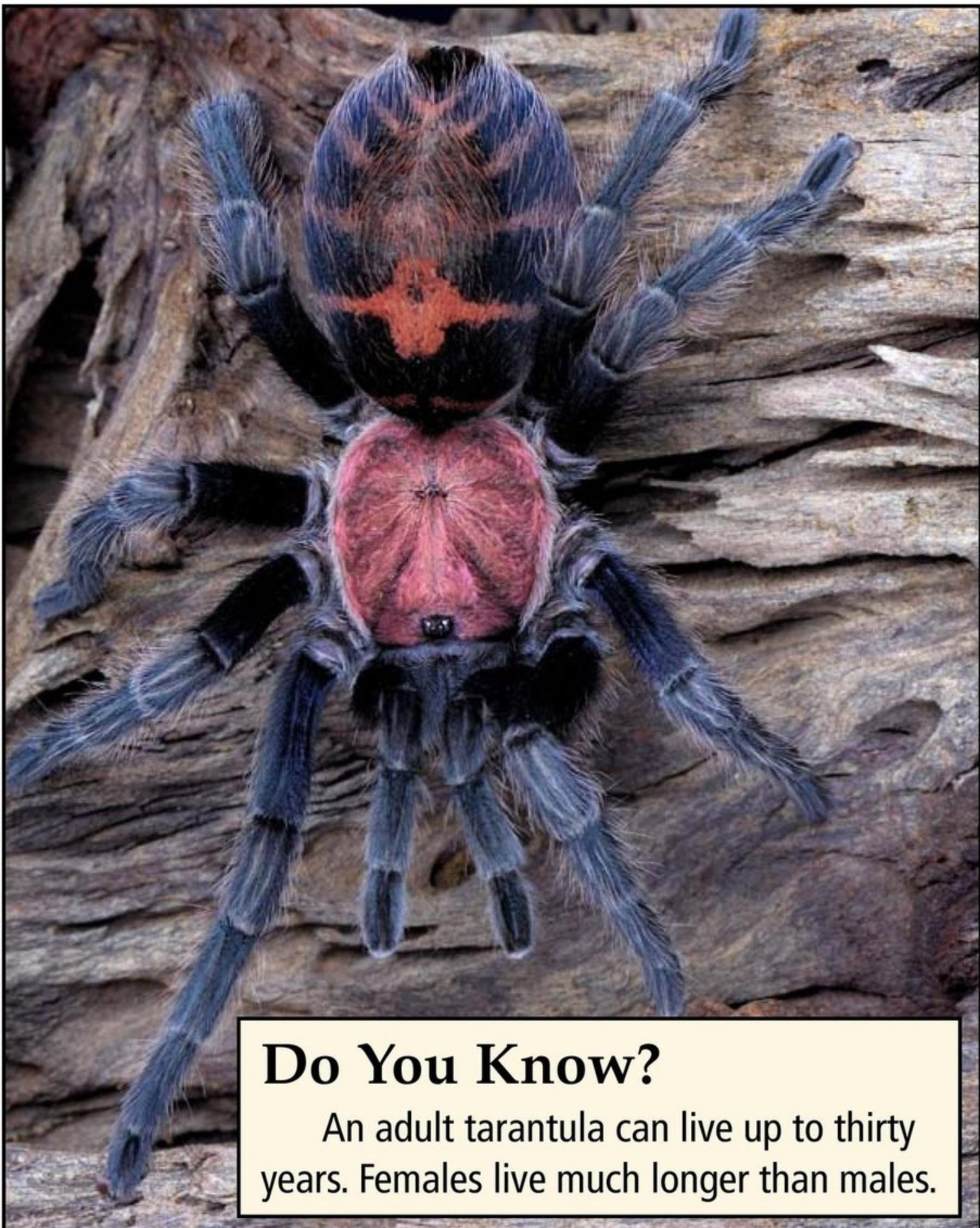
How Safe Are Tarantulas?

Many people are scared of tarantulas because they are so big. Tarantulas are **harmless** if you leave them alone. Some tarantulas are slow and calm. Others are fast and looking for a fight, so don't mess with them!

Do You Know?

Many people keep tarantulas as pets. Certain kinds are safe if you learn how to handle them.





Do You Know?

An adult tarantula can live up to thirty years. Females live much longer than males.

This tiger-rump doppleganger tarantula lives in the rainforests of Costa Rica.

People are a bigger danger to tarantulas than any other threat. These amazing spiders are important to the balance of nature. They deserve to be protected.

Glossary

fangs (<i>n.</i>)	long, sharp, and sometimes hollow teeth (p. 4)
harmless (<i>adj.</i>)	not dangerous (p. 14)
prey (<i>n.</i>)	an animal that is hunted and eaten by a predator (p. 11)
sense (<i>v.</i>)	to receive information about the world through sight, touch, taste, smell, or hearing (p. 7)
spider (<i>n.</i>)	an animal with eight legs that can spin a web (p. 4)
venom (<i>n.</i>)	a poisonous fluid that some animals use to kill prey and defend themselves, usually delivered by biting or stinging (p. 11)

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Front Cover: Mexican red-knee tarantula

Title Page: Goliath bird-eating spider

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