

The Deadliest Animal in the World

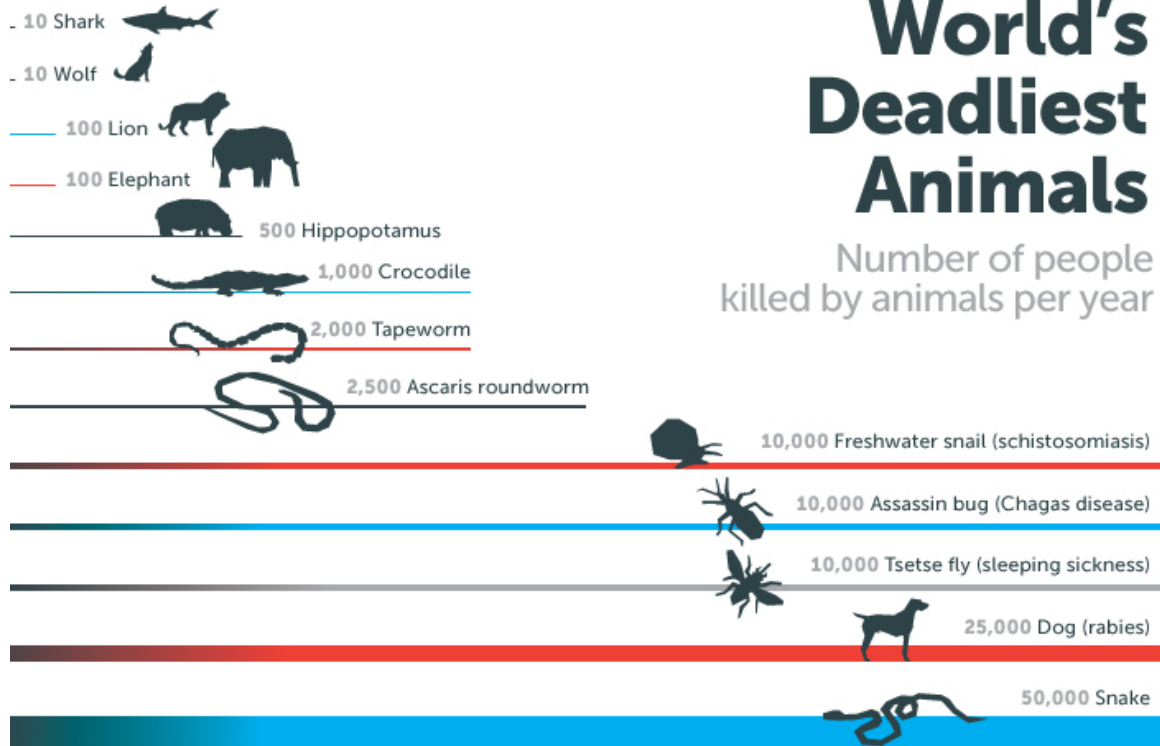
By [Bill Gates](#)
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What would you say is the most dangerous animal on Earth? Sharks? Snakes? Humans?

Of course the answer depends on how you define dangerous. Personally I've had a thing about sharks since the first time I saw *Jaws*. But if you're judging by how many people are killed by an animal every year, then the answer isn't any of the above. It's mosquitoes.

When it comes to killing humans, no other animal even comes close. Take a look:

Number of deaths | Killer



World's Deadliest Animals

Number of people killed by animals per year



475,000
Human



725,000
Mosquito

SOURCES: WHO; crocodile-attack.info; Kasturiratne et al. (doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0050218); FAO (webcitation.org/6OgpS8SVO); Linnell et al. (webcitation.org/6ORL7DBUO); Packer et al. (doi.org/10.1038%2F436927a); Alessandro De Maddalena. All calculations have wide error margins.

What makes mosquitoes so dangerous? Despite their innocuous-sounding name—Spanish for “little fly”—they carry devastating diseases. The worst is malaria, which kills more than 600,000 people every year; another 200 million cases incapacitate people for days at a time. It threatens half of the world’s population and causes billions of dollars in lost productivity annually. Other mosquito-borne diseases include dengue fever, yellow fever, and encephalitis.

There are more than 2,500 species of mosquito, and mosquitoes are found in every region of the world except Antarctica. During the peak breeding seasons, they outnumber every other animal on Earth, except termites and ants. They were responsible for tens of thousands of deaths during the construction of the Panama Canal. And they affect population patterns on a grand scale: In many malarial zones, the disease drives people inland and away from the coast, where the climate is more welcoming to mosquitoes.

Considering their impact, you might expect mosquitoes to get more attention than they do. Sharks kill fewer than a dozen people every year and in the U.S. they get a week dedicated to them on TV every year. Mosquitoes kill 50,000 times as many people, but if there’s a TV channel that features Mosquito Week, I haven’t heard about it.