

Podcast 56 – Australia's Dangerous Animals

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 56 – Australia's Dangerous Animals

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast56.mp3>

Hi,

Australia has a reputation for having lots of dangerous animals. But in reality, unless you go looking for them, you are almost certain never to see any. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about just a few of the dangerous animals we have in Australia. I should add that I am no expert on animals, but like nearly all Australians, I know the places where dangerous animals might be found. If these places are avoided, I believe that Australia is probably as safe as any other country in the world. If you want to learn more about our dangerous animals, I suggest you visit the Australian Geographic website at

<http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/wildlife/2013/03/australias-dangerous-animals-the-top-30/>. There you will find all the scary details about the most dangerous of Australia's animals. But sometimes, it's better not to know all the scary details. Just be sure you always take the well-worn track, take the advice of the local people and you will be okay.

It is interesting that, as an Australian in my 60s, I have seen so few dangerous animals. I think that is true for most Australians. The fact is, most Australians live in the cities or regional towns, where very few dangerous animals are to be found. Nonetheless, for those who are foolish enough to go to certain places in Australia without good preparation, or good advice, or a knowledgeable guide, or the right equipment or

clothing, there could well be dangers awaiting them.

Australia has really only 2 types of large animals that are dangerous. The first is the saltwater crocodile. Now these are really dangerous. They can, and do, eat people. The second is the shark, or at least some types of sharks. They too can eat people. Saltwater crocodiles ('crocs' or 'salties' for short) can grow up to 6.4m long and weigh almost a tonne.



They only live in the rivers, swamps and waterways along the very northern coast of Australia. There are usually 1 – 2 deaths per year from saltwater crocodile attacks, with 4 – 10 non-fatal attacks per year. Luckily, this part of Australia is quite remote and there are not many Australians who live there. But for those who do live in or visit this part of Australia, being 'crocwise' is absolutely critical. Unless there is a sign saying it is safe to do so, going for a swim in this part of Australia could be your last swim.

Shark attacks also happen in Australia. Probably the most

famous shark in Australian waters is the Great White, a huge and dangerous fish which have been known to grow up to 6 metres in length.



Other dangerous sharks are the Tiger Shark, the Bronze Whaler, the Hammerhead and the Grey Nurse. About one quarter of shark attacks are fatal and, in 2014, there were 5 deaths from shark attacks around Australia's coastline. Notwithstanding this, swimming at Australian beaches is a national pastime. If you swim at a beach which is patrolled by lifesavers, and you swim between the flags, the chances of being attacked by a shark are extremely low. When I was a child, I spent most of my summer holidays swimming at our local beach in Bunbury, Western Australia. Not once can I remember a shark alarm. It seems that surfers are the ones most likely to be attacked by sharks, especially in the more remote areas around the coastline. However, around 1 in 10 Australians are surfers, so you can see that, on balance, the number of shark attacks is very low compared to the number of Australians out there

surfing and having fun. Australian surfers seem to love surfing too much to let a few shark attacks keep them from surfing.

The other dangerous animals in Australia are all quite small. One of the things I fear most is snakes. There are 140 types of land snakes in Australia and around 100 of those are venomous. But of these, only around 12 have a venom which can kill you. The most famous is the Taipan which is found in the north of Australia in Queensland. Other snakes include the Tiger snake and the Eastern Brown Snake.



These two snakes are found in the southern areas of Australia. Most people are afraid of snakes, me included. But actually, snakes are also afraid of people and, if left alone, will normally quietly slip away and not attack. Most snake bites in Australia happen when someone tries to kill or capture a snake. Getting bitten when bush walking is reasonably rare. My wife and I recently climbed Mt Bogong in Victoria, which involved walking through quite thick bush for many hours. We kept strictly to the walking track and never saw one single snake, even though they are quite common in that part of Victoria. Keeping to the track is important when you are bush

walking in Australia. That's the best way to avoid meeting a snake. If we had seen one, we would have stopped, then carefully backed away. Luckily, today there are antivenoms available so that, if you do get bitten, as long as you can get to a hospital, there is little chance of dying. Around 2 people die each year from snake bite in Australia, although we have around 500 hospital visits because of snake bite.

There are some dangerous animals in Australia which are very small. The Funnel Web spider and the Red Back spider both have dangerous bites. The Funnel Web is the most dangerous and is found only in New South Wales. It is a dark coloured spider which can be up to 3.5cm long. Luckily, an antivenom became available in 1981 and since then, no deaths have been recorded. We lived in Sydney for 5 years and I never saw one. I don't think I would like to either.

The Red Back spider is more common but their bite is not as dangerous as the Funnel Web.



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These spiders are smaller and are black with a bright red

patch on their back – hence their name. They are found all over Australia and are quite commonly seen hidden away in dry, sheltered places outside the average home. If I went into my garage now and started cleaning out the shelves, I would probably find one. Luckily they are very easy to see. An antivenom became available in the 1950s so there have been no recorded deaths since then.

I hope this podcast hasn't made you feel too uncomfortable. To tell the truth, I found it a little unsettling when I was reading about all the dangerous animals we have, especially the snakes. It just reminds me about the importance of staying on the track when I am out walking.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 56 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

- Play absolutely critical = very, very important
- Play advice = when someone tells you how to do something

- Play afraid = how you feel when you think that someone or something might hurt you
- Play alarm = when someone warns you that there is danger
- Play antivenom = a special medicine which stops you from getting sick after you have been bitten
- Play attack = when someone or an animal tries to hurt you or kill you
- Play Australian Geographic = an Australian wildlife magazine and website
- Play avoided = when you have stopped something from happening
- Play backed = to go backwards
- Play bitten = when an animal bites you
- Play bush = forest
- Play capture = to catch
- Play certain = to be sure about something
- Play certain places = places which have something special
- Play coastline = where the land meets the sea
- Play compared = when you decide if something is better or worse than another
- Play crocwise = an advertising word used in the Northern Territory, which means – know where crocodiles are
- Play dangerous = when you can get hurt or die from something
- Play dark coloured = when something has a dark colour
- Play details = information
- Play equipment = the things you need to do a job. For example, strong boots when bush walking
- Play expert = a person who knows a lot
- Play extremely = when something is very low or very high
- Play fatal = you will die from something
- Play flags = a rectangular piece of cloth with special colours and design, on a pole
- Play foolish = when you are not very smart, or make silly errors
- Play garage = where you put your car
- Play hence = therefore
- Play hospital = a place for the sick, with doctors and

nurses

- Play huge = large
- Play included = when something is put together with others
- Play involved = when you must do certain steps in order to do something
- Play knowledgeable guide = someone who knows a lot about a place and takes you there
- Play lifesavers = people who help you if you have a problem at the beach
- Play local = nearby
- Play national pastime = lots of people do this for fun
- Play nonetheless = despite this, even though,
- Play non-fatal = when you will not die from something
- Play notwithstanding = despite this
- Play on balance = when you think about the pros and the cons
- Play patch = a small area
- Play patrolled = to go up and down to make sure everyone is safe
- Play preparation = to get things ready
- Play quite common = happens a lot
- Play rare = not very common
- Play recorded = when something is written down
- Play regional towns = small cities
- Play reminds = when something helps you to remember
- Play remote = far away from other places
- Play reputation = when you are known for something
- Play scary = when something makes you afraid
- Play sheltered = when the rain and wind cannot get in
- Play shelves = places on the wall where you can put things
- Play slip away = go away
- Play snakes = long thin animal which slides along the ground
- Play strictly = you must follow the rules
- Play surfers = people who ride waves on a board
- Play swamps = an area of land where there is a lot of water
- Play tonne = a large weight, 1000kg
- Play uncomfortable = to feel not very happy
- Play unsettling = when something makes you feel not very

happy

- Play venom = poison. This can make you sick or die
- Play venomous = poisonous. When it bites, it puts poison into you
- Play waterways = rivers and lakes where boats can go
- Play well-worn track = the path that everyone uses