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Beware of Biters

Bears hunt and kill people. Cougars do too. Sharks seek out human blood. Are any of these claims true? Many think they are. People fear these animals. The media adds to that fear. Attacks are big news. However, the facts tell a different story. Wild animals kill very few people in the U.S. each year. On average, one person dies from a bear attack. Sharks kill one person too. Cougars kill less than one. Compare this to accidents. Falling out of bed kills many more. On average, that kills 450 people every year.



FAST FACT: Saber-toothed cats hunted ancient humans. Cave lions did too. Even eagles ate people. This was over 10,000 years ago.

Mutual Fear

A **predator** is an animal that eats other animals.

Prey is an animal that is eaten. There is a reason people fear predators. Humans used to be on the menu. This was long ago. Animals hunted people. They ate humans like any other prey. This lasted millions of years. Then something changed. Human brains grew. Weapons were made. People could kill big animals. Over time, predators began to fear humans.

That fear has lasted. Many predators still see people as a **threat**. Most stay away from humans. The fear is **mutual**. Human brains see those animals as a threat too.



Why Animals Attack

Attacks may be rare. Yet they do happen. Some places have more than others. India is one. Africa is another. Lions and tigers roam wild there. Other deadly animals do too.

Why do they attack? Some are bold. They may be naturally **aggressive**. A second reason is hunger. There are more people than ever before. They compete with animals for food. Hungry beasts are more likely to eat people. Some even get a taste for humans.

There is another reason. It may be the biggest. People have moved into wildlands. Humans and animals share the same space. The chances of attack go up.

PROOF OF FEAR

Experts did a test. They wanted to know if predators really fear people. They set up a camera. It recorded cougars feeding. Speakers played sounds. One sound was of frogs chirping. The other was of people talking. Cougars ignored the frog sounds. But talking people made the cats run away. Half of those cats never came back to finish their meal. This showed that a fear of people is very real.



FAST FACT: People kill predators nine times faster than they die in the wild. Humans are known as super predators. There are no others.

Earth in Balance

Animals eat other animals. This is a simple fact. Earth needs both predators and prey.



FAST FACT: Baboons in Africa eat both plants and animals. Packs of them raid crops. Some kids stay home from school. They have to protect crops.

Few and Fit

Rabbits are fluffy and cute, but what if no animal ate them? Their numbers would grow. Soon there would be too many. Rabbits eat plants. They would eat the land bare. Then they would have nothing to eat. Rabbits would die off. Other animals would starve too. Predators need those animals for food. Whole **species** could die off. Even bugs would be at risk. Many live on plants. Their homes would go away. Birds eat bugs. Reptiles do too. They would also be in danger. Predators keep prey in balance.

Predators also keep prey fit. Sick animals are slower. They are easier to catch. Stronger prey survives. Smarter prey are harder to catch too. Strong and smart prey mate. Their **genes** pass to their **offspring**. This helps the whole species. It stays strong and smart.

Predator-Prey Population Cycle

