



Animal Sidekicks

The Cuckoo and the Reed Warbler



The crafty cuckoo lays her eggs in the nests of other birds, such as reed warblers, forcing them to raise her chicks as their own. It's parenthood without the responsibility.



#1 Scare Tactics:

First, the cuckoo pretends to be a predator to scare a reed warbler away from its nest.



#2 Bad Egg:

The cuckoo lays her egg in the abandoned nest. The egg looks a bit like a reed warbler's – this makes it less likely to notice the new addition.



#3 Sibling Rivalry:

The cuckoo egg hatches earlier than the reed warbler egg. The young cuckoo pushes the other eggs out to make sure it gets all of its adoptive parents' attention.



#4 Big Baby:

The cuckoo baby is steadily fed by both reed warbler parents. By stealing a nest's worth of food, it grows to an enormous size – often much bigger than its adoptive parents. Mother cuckoo's plan was a success, and she didn't have to lift a ginger. (Or rather, a wing.)



Master of Disguise

An adult cuckoo is a relatively harmless bird, but it has a terrifying costume. Its banded underbelly helps it resemble a sparrowhawk – a natural predator to birds like reed warblers.



The Hummingbirds and the Flowers



Hummingbirds are the bees of the big world. These pollinators hover from flower to flower, consuming nectar with their straw-like tongues. Along the way they pick up pollen, before distributing it to other flowers they visit. The flowers do their best to attract hummingbirds with bright colours and sugary nectar.





**Hummingbirds
can visit
thousands
of flowers
every day.**



**Not only can
hummingbirds
hover, but
they can also
fly backwards.**



Tiny Bird

The smallest bird on the planet is the bee hummingbird. Fully grown it is barely 5 cm (2 in) long. It could comfortably perch on a pencil.



The Tongue for the Task

The hummingbird's long beak and longer tongue are tremendous assets. They allow the hummingbird to reach into flowers and pump nectar down its throat. It drinks nectar at a rate of 14 licks per second – these birds do everything fast.



Some hummingbirds have tongues longer than their bodies. When the tongue is not in use, it curls up inside the hummingbird's head.



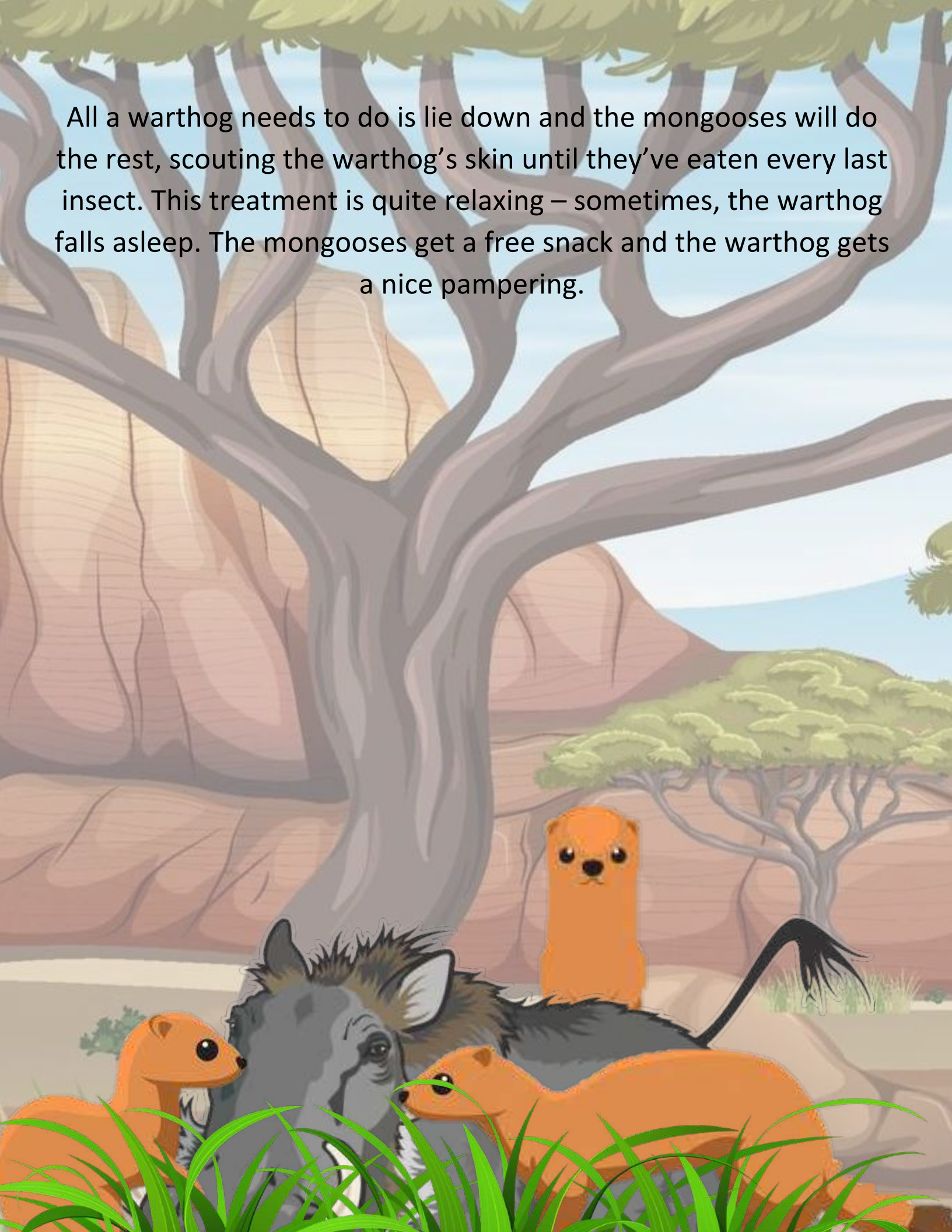
The Warthog and the Mongooses



Warthogs have a problem; they're covered in tiny, itchy, bloodsucking, disease-carrying ticks. Their cloven hooves and enormous tusks don't allow them to remove bugs by themselves. Instead, they visit mongooses, the best bug busters in Africa.



All a warthog needs to do is lie down and the mongooses will do the rest, scouting the warthog's skin until they've eaten every last insect. This treatment is quite relaxing – sometimes, the warthog falls asleep. The mongooses get a free snack and the warthog gets a nice pampering.





THINK

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