

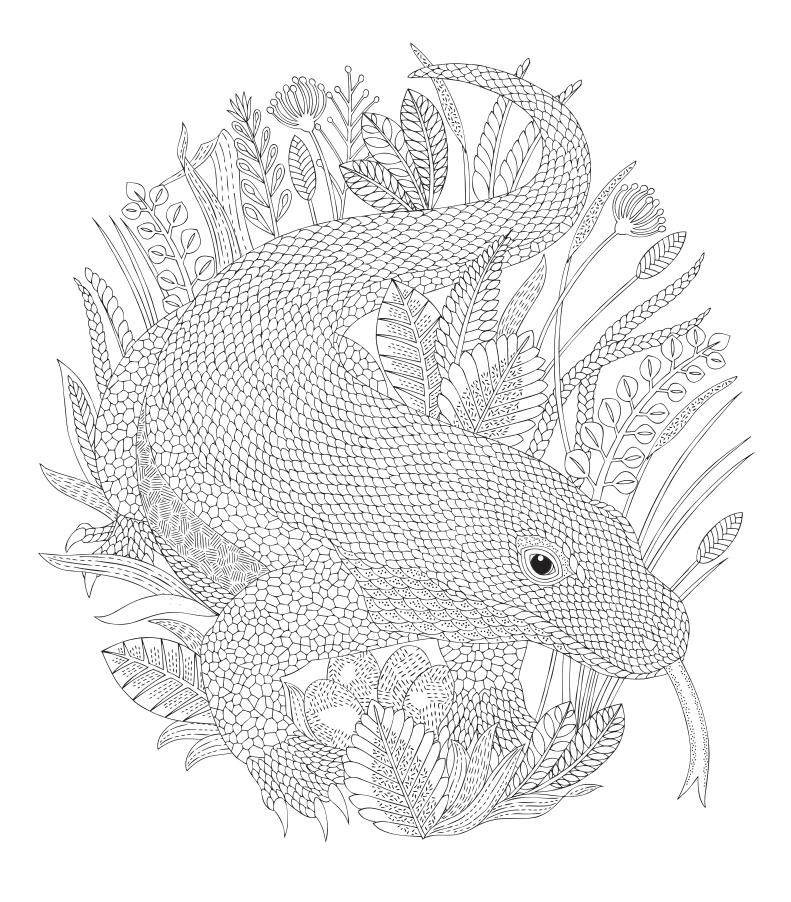
# Komodo Dragon

n the Indonesian island of Komodo, a baby lizard emerges from its egg and scurries up the nearest tree – on the ground, it would be a tasty morsel for adult Komodo dragons. Safely above ground, this baby Komodo gorges on grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, geckos and eggs, remaining there for four years: only then is it large enough to survive at ground level.

These ferocious reptiles are the descendents of gargantuan lizards that lived 4 million years ago. At 3m long and weighing 90kg, the Komodo dragon is now the world's largest living lizard. It can bring down prey as big as a water buffalo with a deadly bite from its powerful jaws and, even if a victim escapes, it will succumb to the venom secreted in glands in the dragon's lower jaw and the dragon will seek out its corpse, from up to 8km away, with its remarkable sense of smell.

Recently, it was discovered that female Komodo dragons can reproduce without a mate. She will lay 15–30 self-fertilized, grapefruit-sized eggs, all male. If a female ended up alone, she could restart the population – though mating with her offspring would not be good for the gene pool.

## — Colouring in —



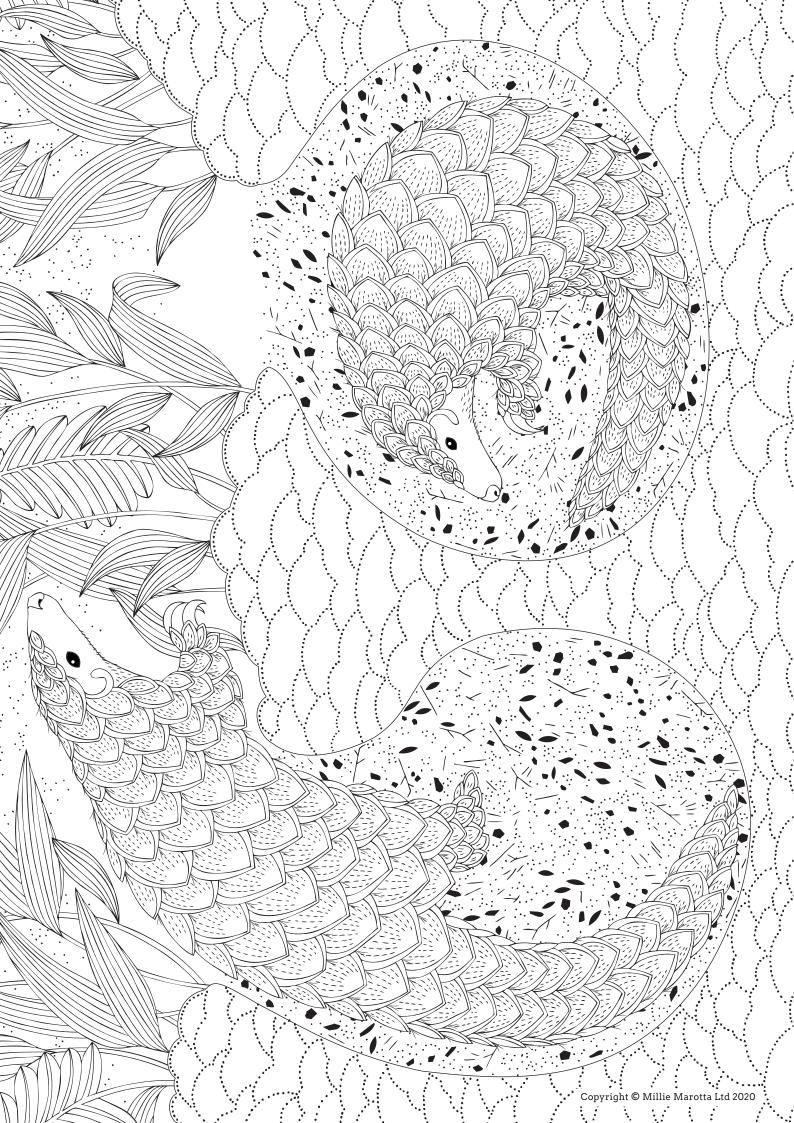


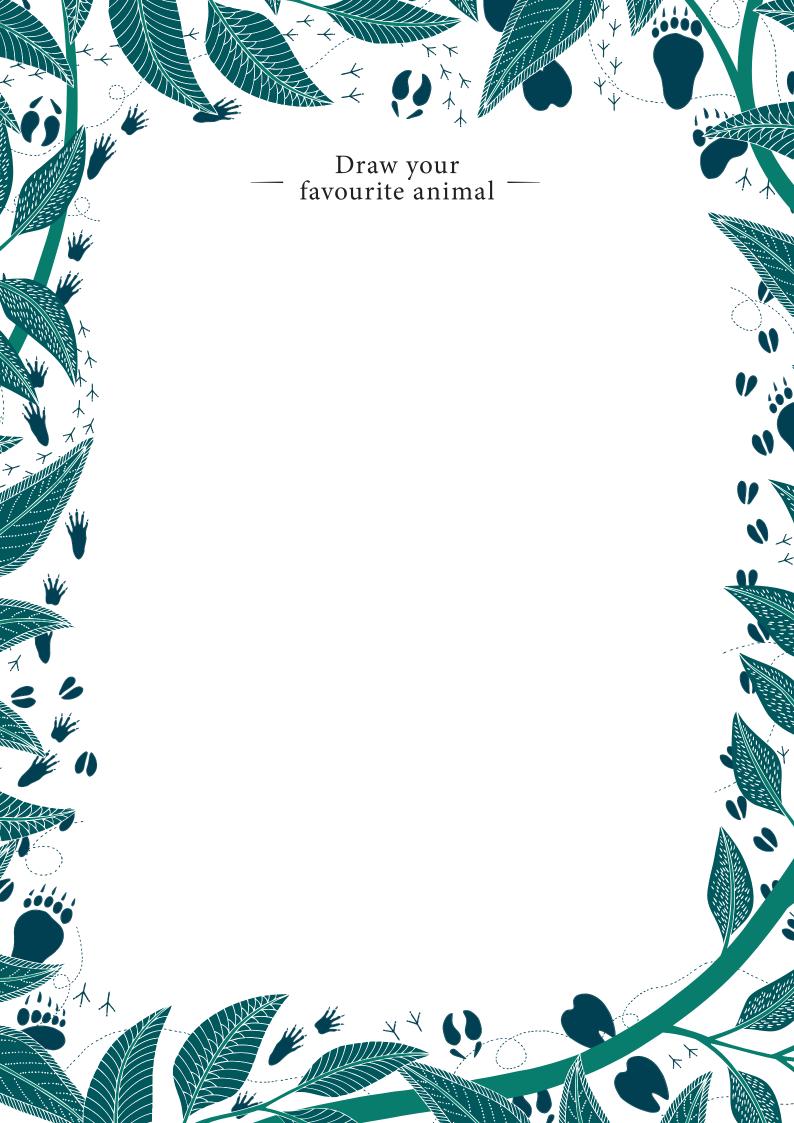
# \_ The most illegally trafficked animal on Earth

## Pangolin

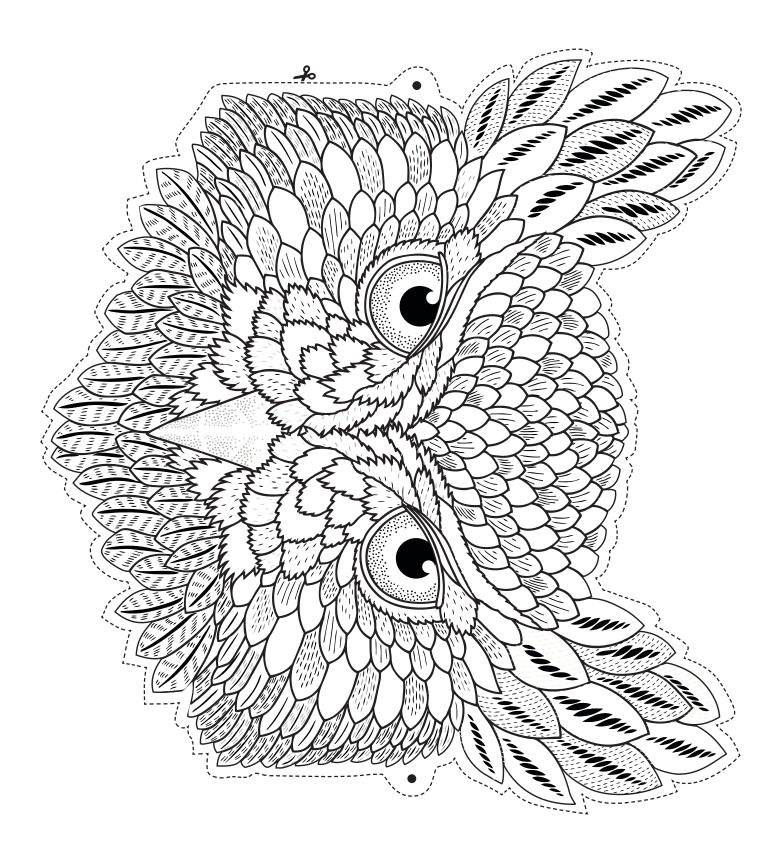
n the grasslands of south-east Asia, a strange creature the size of a domestic cat emerges from a deep burrow in search of its supper. Covered in hard scales but with a soft pink underbelly, beady little eyes, a long snout and a strong, thick tail, it has a sticky tongue as long as its body, to slurp up ants and termites. The Chinese pangolin looks like a walking pine cone – something from the pages of a fairy-tale. Females give birth only once a year, to just one baby at a time, known as a pangopup.

There are eight species of pangolin and all of them are under threat. They are the world's only scaly mammal, and the most illegally trafficked animal on Earth; over 100,000 pangolins are caught by poachers every year across Asia and Africa – that's roughly one every five minutes. These mostly nocturnal creatures are sensitive little souls, making it difficult to care for those rescued. Sadly, the pangolin's defence is also its downfall. It curls up into a tight, scaly ball to protect itself, but this simply makes it easier for a pangolin poacher to scoop them up.





#### — Cut out and decorate your — Blackiston's Fish Owl mask



## Blakiston's Fish Owl

he world's biggest and most endangered owl lives in the riparian forests – forests near water – of south-east Russia, north-eastern China and on Hokkaido Island in Japan. Females, who are often 25 per cent bigger than males, stand at just over 70cm tall, the size of a three-year-old child, with a wingspan of almost two metres. With its size and big ear tufts, in dusky light it can easily be mistaken for a lynx, sometimes even a bear.

The Blakiston's fish owl is a creature of the night, descending in darkness to the water's edge to fish. It can pull a salmon two or three times its weight from the river, but the salmon are being over-fished and the owls can also get caught in the nets laid for them. And there are other threats: deforestation, illegal or unsustainable logging, bush fires and cars on the roads in the old growth forests where they nest.

It can be difficult to persuade people to protect an owl they've never heard of. But the owl has found an unlikely ally in the Amur tiger, a 'flagship' species for conservation. Efforts to stop further devastation of the tiger's habitat by asking logging companies to close unused roads and limit human access might benefit this anonymous owl, too.



