

Worms, Worms, Worms **Fact Sheet**

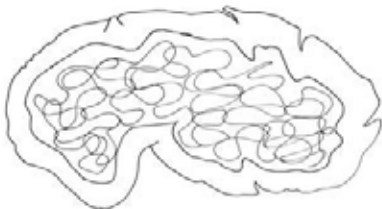


Worms are not all the same! There are about 23 major groups of animals (phyla) which people refer to as 'worms'. Their sometimes superficial similarities hide profound differences in body architecture. For example, acorn worms are more closely related to us than they are to earthworms because they have a very simple spinal cord, called a neurochord.

The term 'Worm' is simply a descriptive name that refers to creeping or burrowing animals with long slender bodies. Of these 23 phyla, only a few are commonly known to most people such as earthworms, leeches and tapeworms. There are also many more worms groups that are not well known, even to the scientific community.

Placozoa

Common name: Placozoans. This minute marine worm may be the most primitive multi-cellular animal. About <0.5 mm in length; 1 species worldwide.



Rhombozoa

Common name: Rhombozoans. Minute worms which only live in squid and octopi as hosts. They are not parasites but live in harmony. About <0.5 mm in length; ~70 species worldwide.



Orthonectida

Common name: Orthonectids. Minute worms which are mostly parasites of other invertebrates. The males are much smaller than the females. About <0.5 mm in length; ~20 species worldwide.



Platyhelminthes

Common names: Flatworms, terrestrial Chinese liver fluke, and tapeworms. This enormous group includes marine flatworms and parasitic worms such as flukes and tapeworms. About 1mm to 1 m in length; ~20,000 species worldwide.



Nemertea

Common name: Ribbon worms. These worms are long and flattened. Common in marine environments, they prey on other invertebrates. About 1 mm to 1 m in length; ~900 species worldwide.



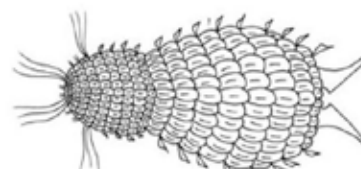
Rotifera

Common name: Rotifers. Worms that are small free living or sessile (attached to a surface). Some filter food particles from the water while others grab small animals with their jaws. About 2-3 mm in length; ~1,800 species worldwide.



Gastrotricha

Common name: Gastrotrichs. These worms have spines, bristles and scale plates covering their bodies. They feed on bacteria and single-celled algae in the water. About <1 mm in length.



Kinorhyncha

Common name: Kinorhynchs. These worms are mostly marine living in the intertidal zone and to depths of 8000 metres. Scientists do not know what these worms feed on. About <1 mm in length; ~150 species worldwide.



Nematoda

Common name: Roundworms e.g. guineaworm, pinworms, hookworms, heartworms, whipworms. These worms are found in marine, freshwater and terrestrial habitats. They are free-living and parasitic. Studies have shown over 90,000 nematodes living in one rotting apple and in good farming land there can be 6 -18 billion nematodes /ha. About <0.5 mm to 30 cm in length; 25,000 species worldwide.



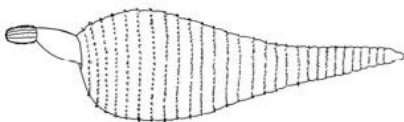
Nematomorpha

Common name: Hairworm, gordian worms. The larvae of these worms are parasitic in insects and crustaceans. The adults live in freshwater creeks, lakes and other water bodies. About <0.5 mm to 20 cm in length; ~320 species worldwide.



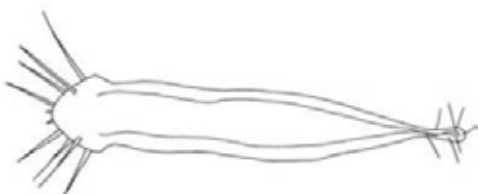
Acanthocephala

Common name: Spiny-headed worms. All of these worms are gut parasites of vertebrates, particularly fish. About <1 mm in length; ~1,100 species worldwide.



Gnathostomulida

Common name: Jaw worms. A minute worm found in marine sands, especially sand with low oxygen that reeks of rotten egg gas. About <1 mm in length; ~80 species worldwide.



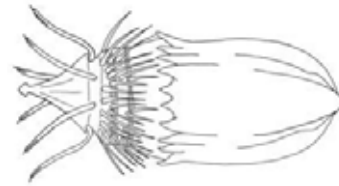
Priapula

Common name: Priapulans, cactus worm. These worms burrow in silty marine sediments. They are most common in cold temperate seas. They feed on polychaete worms. About 0.5 mm to 20 cm in length; 16 species worldwide.



Loricifera

Common name: Loriciferans. These worms live in muddy marine sediments, at depths of 300-450 metres. One species has been found at 8000 metres. About <0.3 mm in length; 10 species worldwide.



Cycliophora

Common name: Cycliophorans. Only discovered in 1995, this single species, currently the only member of its phylum, lives on the mouth parts of lobsters. The worms pick up food particles left in the water while the lobster feeds. The males are much smaller than the females. About <0.3 mm in length; 1 species worldwide.



Sipuncula

Common name: Peanut worms. Peanut worms are exclusively marine. They are found from the intertidal zone and to depths of 5000 metres. About 1 cm to 50 cm in length; ~320 species worldwide.



Echiura

Common name: Spoon worm. These worms live in marine or estuarine areas. They live within the mud and extend their proboscis along the surface of the sediment to feed. About 1cm to 40cm in length; ~135 species worldwide.



Annelida

Common name: *Segmented worms* e.g. marine worms, earthworms, leeches. The Phylum Annelida includes three major groups of familiar worms: the Polychaeta (marine worms); Oligochaeta (earthworms); and Hirudinea (leeches). Some annelids are free living while others are parasitic. Their habitats range from rainforests to the abyssal depths of the oceans. About <1 mm - 4 metres in length; ~16,500 species worldwide.



Aberrantannelids

'Pogonophora' and 'Vestimentifera'. **Common name:** *Gianttube worms*. These worms are found at depths of 100 to 10,000 metres and are usually associated with hydrothermal vents, methane seeps, or sunken whale carcasses. About 10 to 75cm in length; ~100 species worldwide.



Phoronida

Common name: *Horseshoe worms*. Horseshoe worms are all tube dwellers. They produce a cement-like substance which glues together sediment to produce a tube. They are found from intertidal mudflats to depths of 400 metres. About 5 to 20 cm in length; 20 species worldwide.



Chaetognatha

Common name: *Arrow worms*. Arrow worms are wholly marine planktonic animals. These worms are predators, actively hunting zooplankton at the water's surface. About 0.5 to 12 cm in length; ~100 species worldwide.



Hemichordata

Common name: *Acorn worm*. These worms are strictly marine and live in sediments. They are primitive vertebrates because they possess a very simple spinal cord, termed a neurochord. About 1 mm to 1 m in length; ~85 species worldwide.



Other 'worms'

Shipworm

These 'worms' are not worms at all but actually a type of clam (i.e. a bivalve mollusc). They have a reduced shell with large elongated bodies. They are well known for their destruction of wooden structures submerged in salt water

Silkworm, glowworms, woodworms, mealworms, screwworm

All these 'worms' are insect larvae.

Slowworm

A slowworm is a legless lizard. Snakes and lizards differ from worms by having a true backbone and spinal cord.

Ringworm

Ringworm is actually a fungal infection of the skin.

Further Information

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