

Worm

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Worms /ˈwɜːrm/ are many different distantly related animals that typically have a long cylindrical tube-like body and no limbs. Worms vary in size from microscopic to over 1 metre (3.3 ft) in length for marine polychaete worms (bristle worms),^[1] 6.7 metres (22 ft) for the African giant earthworm, *Microchaetus*,^[2] and 58 metres (190 ft) for the marine nemertean worm (bootlace worm), *Lineus longissimus*.^[3] Various types of worm occupy a small variety of parasitic niches, living inside the bodies of other animals. Free-living worm species do not live on land, but instead live in marine or freshwater environments, or underground by burrowing.

In biology, "worm" refers to an obsolete taxon, *vermes*, used by Carolus Linnaeus and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck for all non-arthropod invertebrate animals, now seen to be paraphyletic. The name stems from the Old English word *wyrm*. Most animals called "worms" are invertebrates, but the term is also used for the amphibian caecilians and the slow worm *Anguis*, a legless burrowing lizard. Invertebrate animals commonly called "worms" include annelids (earthworms and marine polychaete or bristle worms), nematodes (roundworms), platyhelminthes (flatworms), marine nemertean worms ("bootlace worms"), marine Chaetognatha (arrow worms), priapulid worms, and insect larvae such as grubs and maggots.

Worms may also be called helminths, particularly in medical terminology when referring to parasitic worms, especially the Nematoda (roundworms) and Cestoda (tapeworms) which reside in the intestines of their host. When an animal or human is said to "have worms", it means that it is infested with parasitic worms, typically roundworms or tapeworms. Lungworm is also a common parasitic work found in various animal species such as fish and cats.

Contents

- 1 Informal grouping
- 2 Society and culture
- 3 Imagery in the arts
- 4 See also
- 5 References

Informal grouping

In everyday language, the term *worm* is also applied to various other

Worms



Lumbricus terrestris, the common earthworm

Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Subkingdom:	Eumetazoa
(unranked):	Bilateria

Phyla

- Annelida (segmented worms)
- Arthropoda (inchworms, sometimes called "canker worms")
- Chaetognatha (arrow worms)
- Gnathostomulid (jaw worms)
- Hemichordata (acorn/tongue worms)
- Nematoda (roundworms)
- Nematomorpha (horsehair worms)
- Nemertea (ribbon worms)
- Onychophora (velvet

living forms such as larvae, insects, millipedes, centipedes, shipworms (teredo worms), or even some vertebrates (creatures with a backbone) such as blindworms and caecilians. Worms can be divided into several groups, but are still technically decomposers.

- The first of these, Platyhelminthes, includes the flatworms, tapeworms, and flukes. They have a flat, ribbon- or leaf-shaped body with a pair of eyes at the front. Some are parasites.
- The second group contains the threadworms, roundworms, and hookworms. This phylum is called Nematoda. Threadworms may be microscopic, such as the vinegar eelworm, or more than 1 metre (3 feet) long. They are found in damp earth, moss, decaying substances, fresh water, or salt water. Some roundworms are also parasites. The Guinea worm, for example, gets under the skin of the feet and legs of people living in tropical countries.
- The third group consists of the segmented worms, with bodies divided into segments, or rings. This phylum is called Annelida. Among these are the earthworms and the bristle worms of the sea.

In earlier taxonomic classification, all the above were included in the now obsolete group Vermes, a paraphyletic assemblage of unrelated phyla.

Familiar worms include the earthworms, members of phylum Annelida. Other invertebrate groups may be called worms, especially colloquially. In particular, many unrelated insect larvae are called "worms", such as the railroad worm, woodworm, glowworm, bloodworm, inchworm, mealworm, silkworm, and woolly bear worm.

Worms may also be called helminths, particularly in medical terminology when referring to parasitic worms, especially the Nematoda (roundworms) and Cestoda (tapeworms). Hence "helminthology" is the study of parasitic worms. When a human or an animal, such as a dog or horse, is said to "have worms", it means that it is infested with parasitic worms, typically roundworms or tapeworms. Deworming is a method to kill off the worms that have infected a human or animal by giving anthelmintic drugs.

"Ringworm" is not a worm at all, but a skin fungus.

Society and culture

Wurm, or *wyrm* was the Old English term for carnivorous reptiles ("serpents"), and mythical dragons. Worm has been used as a pejorative epithet to describe a cowardly, weak or pitiable person.

Imagery in the arts

See also

- worms)
- Phoronida (horseshoe worms)
- Platyhelminthes (flatworms)
- Priapulida (phallus worms)
- Sipuncula (peanut worms)
- Cestoda (tapeworms)



White tentacles of *Eupolymnia crassicornis* below red sea urchin in Kona, Hawaii



Paragordius tricuspidatus
(Nematomorpha)

- Sea worm, lists various types of marine worms
- Worm cast
- Worm charming

References

1. "Cornwall – Nature – Superstar Worm". BBC.
2. Keely Parrack (21 June 2005) "The Mighty Worm" (http://web.archive.org/web/20090219141951/http://www.wormdigest.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=102&Itemid=2). *Worm Digest*.
3. Mark Carwardine (1995) *The Guinness Book of Animal Records*. Guinness Publishing. p. 232.

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Categories: Obsolete invertebrate taxa



Pseudoceros dimidiatus, a species of flatworm



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