

This Month



Mud Worm

Colloquial Nickname: Whip mudworm

Scientific name: *Polydora ligni*

Field Markings: Slightly reddish in color

Size: 1 inch long, quarter-inch wide

Habitat: Intertidal and subtidal, rocky shores, soft mud or sand, on oyster beds, pilings

Seasonal Appearance: Year-round

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

Mud worms are small, segmented tube-building worms, similar to clamworms. They can be identified by two long, coiled organs, called palps, that extend from the head section and are used to sense and collect food. The fragile palps are often destroyed during collection of the worm, making identification difficult.

Along each body segment, mud worms have bristles, or paddles, which are used for swimming and extra traction in the mud.

Mud worms are slender, cylindrical and mostly transparent. They have two long antennae, a forked lobe above the mouth and a forked tail. Four eyes are positioned in a rectangular shape on its head.

Unlike wandering worms that seek out prey (such as the clamworm), mud worms capture food as it comes to them, using their specially modified palps. The fifth body segment is wide and has minute hooks and a suctionlike tail that holds the worm in its tube. The palps can be seen extending from the tube of the worm as the animal grasps for its food.



Mud worms are among the most abundant worms in Narragansett Bay. Often gathering in large colonies they can smother other benthic invertebrates in the area.

To collect food, the mud worm sweeps the bottom of the sea floor with its palps. They usually collect bits of sediment and excrete the mud after separating out the food. This mud will build up around the worms, creating a several-inch deep layer of sediment around the worm colony.

RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

In areas heavily populated with mud worms, over 50 worms can be present per square inch. This can have a significant impact on oyster beds, as the oysters can be completely buried in sediment accumulated from mud worms. This can lead to suffocation of the oyster bed.

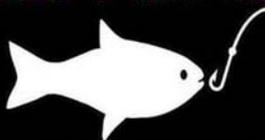
Mud worms have been found in large numbers thriving in areas with considerable oil pollution. Experiments have shown that the populations will continue to grow even in the presence of oil.

HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

RISAA members can purchase their own copy of *The Uncommon Guide To Common Life on Narragansett Bay* for \$15 from the RISAA Merchandise Committee. Stop by the committee table at any monthly RISAA meeting.



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