



leech

representative species

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Annelida - segmented worms
Class: Hirudinea
Order:
Family:

FEATURES

Leeches are two to three inches long. Unlike earthworms, they do not have setae, or bristles, on the ventral, or belly, side. A sucker is found at each end of the flattened, segmented body.

BEHAVIORS

Leeches live in water or moist habitats. Many leeches are external parasites that suck blood, but some are scavengers and others are predators. A parasitic leech makes a small cut on the host and uses a painkiller and an anti-coagulant (substance that keeps blood from clotting) to keep the host unaware of its presence. A leech can feed quickly, swelling its body with blood. It may not need to feed again for several months. A leech can move by swimming or with an inch-worm type movement. It may travel between water bodies by attaching to mobile animals like turtles and birds. The leech is a hermaphrodite. It produces both eggs and sperm but at different times. The adults often remain with the eggs in the water. The body movements of the adults make a water current for bringing more oxygen to the eggs. The young hatch as miniature leeches and attach to the adult until they first feed.

HABITATS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bottomland forests | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> rivers & streams |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lakes, ponds & reservoirs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> swamps |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lake Michigan | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> temp water supplies |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> marshes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> wet prairies & fens |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> peatlands | |

ILLINOIS STATUS

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> common | <input type="checkbox"/> endangered | <input type="checkbox"/> threatened |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>native</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>exotic</u> | |

ILLINOIS RANGE

statewide

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.
Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume I: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.