

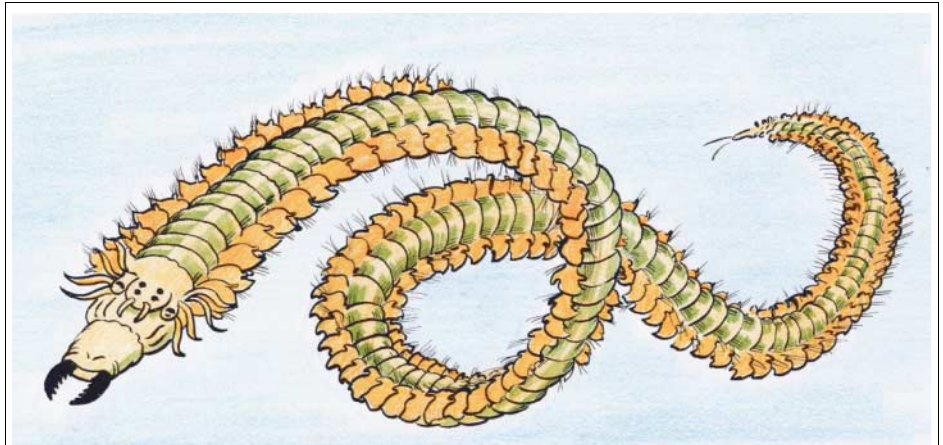
Aquatic Life

The Wonderful World of Worms...

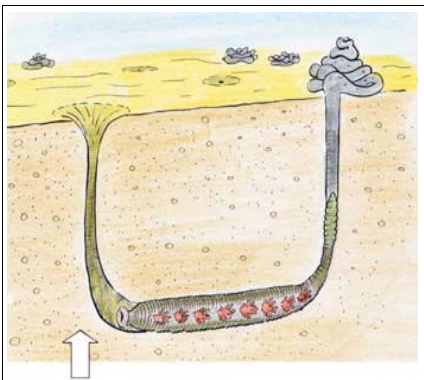
The worms you find under rocks on the shoreline or when digging in the sand, are most likely to come from the animal group Polychaeta (pronounced "Polly-keeta"), which means "many hairs".

Worms have no bone and no skeleton, which makes them very flexible, and they rely on pumping water through their bodies to make them rigid.

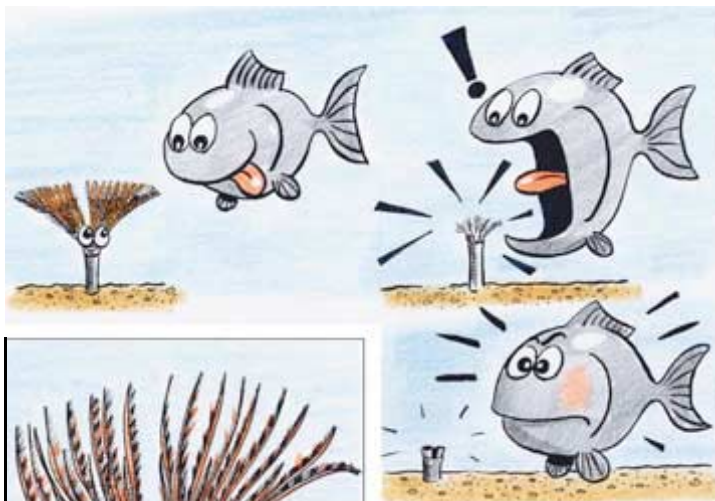
Scientists classify the Polychaeta into two main sub-groups: the "errant" polychaetes - that actively swim about looking for food (just as the "Knights Errant" of old used to ride around looking for adventure - and the "sedentary" polychaetes, which prefer to stay at home and let the food come to them.



Errant polychaete worms, such as the Common Ragworm (*Nereis diversicolor*) shown above, have well developed heads with eyes and jaws. They also have paddles - called "parapods" - on either side of each segment to allow them to move swiftly through the sand or even to swim in open water (although they prefer to keep under cover to avoid other predators). Ragworms can grow to around six inches long and prefer to live in burrows. Here they spin thin webs with mucous from their mouths, which they use like old-fashioned fly paper to catch tiny floating animals - sucking back the mucous web, animals and all. Be careful if you find them when you are digging in the sand however, because the jaws can give you a nasty bite!

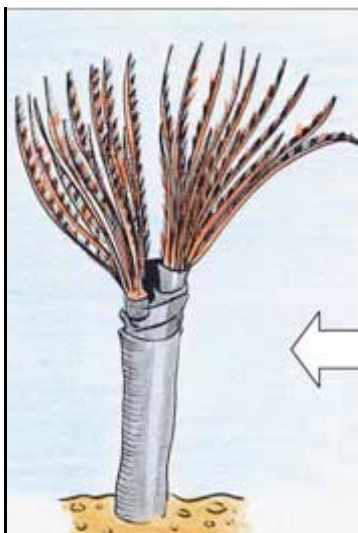


The Common Lugworm (*Arenicola marina*) shown above, is a **sedentary polychaete**. It lives in a U-shaped burrow and can be detected on sandy shores by the little cone shaped burrow at the head end where water is sucked in, and the squiggle of sand it pushes out at the other end, once it has sucked all the tiny animals and other food out of it. Lugworms push out sand every 40-45 minutes. If you stand still on the beach and watch, you may even see it!



**Captain
Cockle's
Log**

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Other sedentary polychaetes, like the Peacock Worm *Sabella pavonina*, have complex and beautiful gills which they use not only to breathe underwater, but also to catch food. To protect themselves, they are very sensitive to movement and can zip down into their tubes at the slightest hint of danger.

Log onto www.captaincockle.com

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