



Clamworms

What are they?

Clamworms belong to a family of worms called bristle worms. Bristle worms have segmented bodies. Each segment has a pair of legs, called pseudopodia, which means “false feet.” Tiny hairs or bristles stick out from each of these legs.

What do they look like?

Clamworms can be as large as 5 or 6 inches long. However, the clamworms you find in the Bay are usually shorter than that. Their bodies are usually a reddish-brown. These worms have very unusual heads. They have four eyes, two tiny antennas, and eight tentacles. It also has two feelers that stick out of its mouth. These are called palps. All of these help clamworms sense what’s going on in their environment.

Where can you find them?

You can find clamworms throughout the Bay. They seem to tolerate all kinds of water—from the very salty water near the mouth of the Bay to the fresher water of the Bay’s rivers.

How do they behave?

Clamworms eat by sticking out a sharp club-like proboscis. There are tiny claws at the end of their proboscis. They use the claws to grab their food. Then they draw the proboscis—and their food—back into their mouths.

These worms are very active (especially at night) and move around the bottom of the Bay to find their food.

They can even create their own protection. As they burrow into the bottom of the Bay, clamworms ooze a kind of mucus. The mucus mixes with the silt or sand to form a hard protective tube around their bodies. They can easily and quickly move in and out of these tubes.

What do they eat?

Clamworms eat other worms, parts of fish, and algae.

What eats them?

Many Bay creatures prey on clamworms. Some of them include striped bass and croakers, star fish (sea stars), sea urchins, skates, crabs, and some shore birds.

Creature Feature

Clamworms and other animals living at the bottom of the Bay and the environment they live in make up a special community called the benthos. The benthos is particularly sensitive to pollution. Poisons that enter the Bay often settle to its bottom. Many benthic animals cannot escape these areas at the bottom of the Bay where other problems—such as low levels of oxygen in the water—happen. Because of this, the benthos—and the health of all its creatures—is considered to be an important indicator of the health of the Bay.

