

BAYLANDS

Worms

Worms are the most numerous creatures on earth. and are found all over the world, in every environment. The Palo Alto Baylands are no exception. The mud flats and bay waters provide an excellent habitat for many types of marine worms and nematodes.

Marine worms are called *Polychaeta*. They are characterized by having ring-like, segmented, bristled bodies. They are very primitive, colorful, and fantastic. They can be extremely small or yards long, and can have from 6 to 800 segments. Some worms are free moving while others are sedentary and live in tube-like burrows in the mud at the bottom of the bay.

The sedentary *Polychaeta* tube worms live in ocean waters and are not common in the waters of the bay. They tend to live in clusters of parchment-like sand-covered tubes. Multi-colored plumes of tentacles are extended by these worms as they search for food, making them resemble a garden of flowers.

A tube worm called the Lugworm builds a leathery tube under the sea floor. It takes in sandy water

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from one end, extracts the food, and pushes the sand and waste out the other opening. As a result, large amounts of sediment are removed from the sea floor by these worms.

Reproduction is accomplished in many ways by *Polychaeta*. Some shed gametes (sperm and egg) directly into the water. Free swimming larvae will eventually settle onto a suitable surface. Some worms split into pieces and each piece grows a new head or tail region. Other worms grow long chains of individuals which eventually break apart.

Nematodes are another major class of worms. They live in soil, as parasites, and some species live in the Baylands mud. They are usually microscopically small with a smooth body surface and thread-like shape. Their thin, unsegmented bodies are round in front with a pointed end. When disturbed they move with a whip-like motion.

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