

Nova Scotia's bloodworm

Bloodworms (*Glycera sp.*) belong to the phylum of animals known as the Annelida (that include earthworms) and make their home along Nova Scotia's coastlines in the intertidal and subtidal zones, submerged in sand, mud and gravel. These marine worms lay their eggs in the early summer months, when water temperatures warm up sufficiently. The worms swim to the surface in swarms where they release their eggs and sperm.



Like many other marine annelids, bloodworms have stiff, hair-like bristles (setae) along the length of their body. They also have the fearsome feature of a beak-like proboscis, which they use to catch food and, when possible, give unwary humans a sharp nip.

For many years the commercial and recreational harvest of bloodworms in Nova Scotia has been an unregulated fishery. Commercially, the worms are harvested for export to the sports fishing industry in the United States and Europe, and also as a source of feed for shrimp aquaculture. According to one report, per pound, marine worms are the most valuable natural resource of any major North American marine species.

Since the drastic decline of the bloodworm stocks along the coast of Maine, there has been an increase in demand for Nova Scotia's bloodworms. In Yarmouth County, where bloodworms have been a lucrative export business since the 1950s, one long-time bait dealer observed that the worms have almost disappeared from his area.

Many people feel that the species may be at risk. This has led to an increased interest in conservation. In 2002, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) began issuing exploratory licenses to commercial marine worm harvesters.

Along the Hants Shore of the Minas Basin, some local residents have become increasingly concerned that the recent influx of commercial harvesters into their coastal region not only puts the bloodworm at risk, but also jeopardizes the habitat for certain fish species and migratory birds.

Science is only beginning to comprehend how tidal ecologies function. What is known is that the bloodworm and the many other marine invertebrates that inhabit the mudflats and subtidal zones of the Avon River and Minas Basin are integral to a finely tuned system of biological diversity. The Hants Shore Concerned Citizens group - comprised of local residents, fishermen, educators,

and environmentalists - is currently working with DFO to find a sustainable solution to maintain the ecological integrity and unique marine habitat of this coastal region.

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