



Ribbon Worms

What are they?

Ribbon worms are nemertine worms. These kinds of worms are long and flattened, looking like a piece of ribbon. Nemertine worms are soft. Their bodies are not segmented like earthworms.

What do they look like?

As their name suggests, ribbon worms look like long ribbons. There are several different kinds of ribbon worms that you can see in the Bay. They range in size from 1-1/2 inches to over 12 inches.

Where can you find them?

Ribbon worms like to burrow into the soft sands in the intertidal flats. However, you can also find them under rocks and swimming freely. Different kinds of worms prefer different levels of salt in the water, so they live throughout the Bay—from the lower Bay, whose water has a higher salt content to the upper Bay, whose waters have a lower salt content.

How do they behave?

Ribbon worms get their scientific name from a very unusual feature. They have a proboscis (which is like a snout or nose) that they extend to get food. Most of the times, ribbon worms carry this proboscis inside a tube. They use their muscles to shoot out the proboscis when they see something good to eat. The proboscis coils around the prey. It covers it with mucus, which is sometimes poisonous. Some types of ribbon worms also have tiny pointed spikes at the end of their proboscis. They stick their spikes into the prey over and over again.

Ribbon worms contract and expand their muscles as they squirm about. Sometimes they even get tangled up by this motion.

Ribbon worms are very fragile. They can break apart if you ever try to handle them.

What do they eat?

Ribbon worms are meat eaters (carnivores). They like to feed on bristle worms, mollusks such as snails small fish, and other animals they find as they swim through the Bay.

What eats them?

Fish such as spot and croaker, who feed at the bottom of the Bay, often eat ribbon worms.

Creature Feature

One tiny ribbon worm found in the Bay—the leech ribbon worm—lives inside clams. It eats some of the food the clams collect.

