

Macroinvertebrate: Flatworm



Ecological Role:

Flatworms have multiple parasitic forms that can be devastating for humans and other animals. The infamous tapeworm is a very specialized form of parasitic flatworm. Most freshwater flatworms live in ditches, streams, lakes, ponds and puddles, choosing to burrow under plants, rocks and other debris to stay out of direct sunlight.

Lifecycle:

The lifespan of the flatworm is unknown in the wild, but members of one flatworm species ranged between 60 and 140 days while under study in captivity.

How to identify it:

Flatworms are distinguished by their very flat shape, which is necessitated by their lack of any respiratory or circulatory systems. Flatworms are remarkably hardy, with the ability to shrink down to their original hatching size when they do not have enough food but then grow back to their adult size when they receive food again.

Pollution Sensitivity:

While flatworms are durable within their environment, pollution places flatworms at risk, along with other species. If flatworms and other consumers of zooplankton and algae are not numerous enough to control the populations, the algae can spread significantly, taking light and oxygen away from other species in ponds.