

Freshwater Leech (Class Hirudinea)

Annelid worms (33 segments)

Size: 5mm to 15cm

Carnivore – Different species either swallow their prey whole, suck it dry or attach themselves to hosts as parasites. Prey includes earthworms, snails, insect larvae, fish, tadpoles, ducks (inside their nasal cavities), dead animals, other leeches, annelid worms and flatworms.

Breathes by absorbing oxygen through skin by diffusion.



Often have small sucker at anterior end and larger sucker at posterior end. Move by looping but many can swim well. Most have eyespots. They are hermaphrodite.

a) Jawed leeches – 3 powerful jaws with sharp teeth along edge. Attach to host animal. 10 eyes. Blood red. Eggs laid on land with no parental care. e.g. Haemovis sanguisuga (Horse Leech)

b) Fish leeches (and relatives) – Muscular proboscis that stretches out and bores into prey, sucking out blood. Blood colourless. Glossiphonids are flat, egg-shaped or oblong. Firm and rubbery to touch and roll into ball if disturbed. Eggs and young guarded by adult or carried under its belly. e.g. Glossiphonia sp.

c) Swallowing leeches – No proboscis or jaws and swallow prey whole. 8 eyes. Blood red and undertake no parental care. e.g. Erpobdella sp.