

# Leech

Class: *Hirudinia* Order: *Rhynenobdella*



CREEK CONNECTIONS,  
Allegheny College

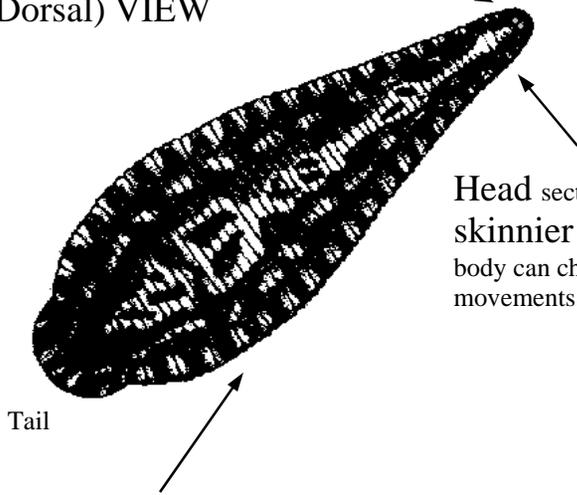
Size: 5-100 mm (adult)

Number of species in North America: 63

Eyes may be visible and are located  
in various places depending on the species.

TOP (Dorsal) VIEW

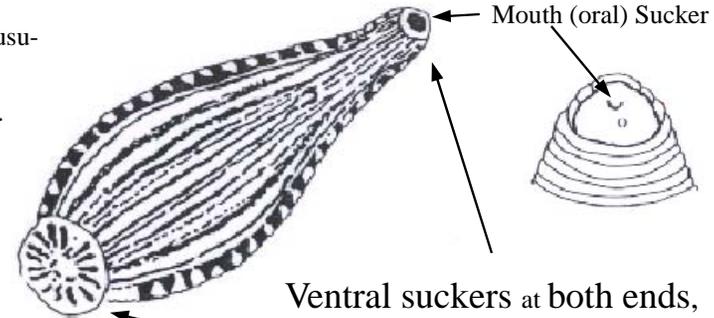
BOTTOM (Ventral) VIEW



Tail

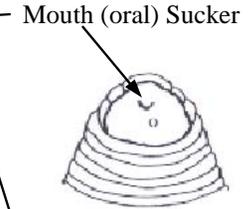
Head section is usually  
skinnier than rear, but  
body can change with  
movements.

Ventral side is usu-  
ally paler in color  
than dorsal side.



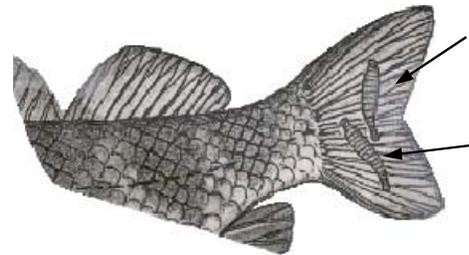
Rear Sucker

Ventral suckers at both ends,  
rear suckers are usually larger.



Mouth (oral) Sucker

Flat, segmented body sometimes  
with patterns and/or bright colors



Sometimes attach to and feed  
off of living organisms  
such as fish amphibians and reptiles.

## SIMILAR TO: Planarian

- Planarian do not have suckers, leeches have suckers.
- Planarian do not have body segments, leeches have body segments.

**Diet:** Through suckers they scavenge or prey on insects, mollusks, and worms. Some are blood suckers to fish, amphibians, reptiles and water fowl.

**Food for:** Some fish and predaceous water insects.

**Habitat:** Bottom dweller along rocks and leaves or attach to other animals in ponds, streams, lakes, and rivers. Prefer slow stagnant waters.

**Movement:** Suckers used for movement, slide around, some may swim.

**Breathing:** Open breathing system, breath through skin and may move in wave-like motion to increase oxygen intake.

**Water Quality Indicator:** Group III- can exist under a wide range of water quality conditions including polluted waters.

Credits:  
*Headstrom, Richard. Adventures with Freshwater Animals, 1964.*

*Reid, K. George. A Golden Guide to Pond Life, 1995.*

*Voshell, J. Reese Jr. A Guide to Common Freshwater Invertebrates of North America, 2002.*

## Life Cycle Corner

Ring-like structures form a cocoon around eggs. These structures can be found laying on the stream bottom or slightly buried under sediment.

### Incomplete Metamorphosis

Eggs are carried in a sac cocoon on the underside of the female. Young hatch and remain attached to the mother, feeding on her mucus.



OR

