

Invertebrates Fact Sheet

Invertebrates are animals that do not have a backbone. It is believed that approximately 97% of all animals are invertebrates. Although there are many subgroups of invertebrates, some of the most common subgroups include sponges, mollusks, annelids and arthropods.

Sponges

A sponge is a rather unique invertebrate which is most often found in salt water. However, close to 150 species of sponges can be found living in fresh water. One of the unique characteristics of the sponge is that it has many tiny pores throughout it in which water flows in and out. As water flows through these pores, the sponge is able to obtain nourishment and oxygen from the water. Water moves into a central hole in the sponge and out through the top. Sponges obtain their food and eliminate wastes through this passage of water. To date there is anywhere between 5,000 to 10,000 known species of sponges.

Segmented Worms

Worms can be found almost anywhere in the world. If you were to closely observe a variety of worms, you would notice that their bodies do not have limbs. In addition, their bodies can be divided into segments. Most worms have either long or short bristles on their body. The majority of worms are quite small, measuring only a fraction of an inch to several inches long. Yet, there are some worms such as the ribbon worm that can grow up to 100 feet in length.

Mollusks

Mollusks are another common type of invertebrate which are typically found in the ocean. However, some types of mollusks have adapted to living on land. Most mollusks have either an inner or outer shell which they use to protect themselves. Snails, oysters and clams are all examples of mollusks as they have outer shells. A squid is also an example of a mollusk as it has an inner shell called a pin. The octopus is an example of mollusk that doesn't have an inner or an outer shell.

Echinoderms

Echinoderms have arms that extend from the middle body outwards. They have radial symmetry, meaning that all sides of the organism look identical. Echinoderms have tube feet that take in oxygen from the water and spines. Examples may be sea stars, brittle stars, sea cucumbers, or sea urchins.

Arthropods

The arthropod subgroup makes up the largest known group of animals on the planet. Arthropods have hard outer bodies which are known as exoskeletons. As arthropods grow they must get rid of their exoskeleton through a process called molting. Arthropods also have jointed legs. Crayfish, flies, centipedes, ants and spiders are all members of the arthropod subgroup.