

Uncommon Invertebrates

Broadhead Planarian by Brenda Huff

Latin name: *Bipalium eventitium*

Common name: Land Planarian or

Hammerhead Worm

Family: Geoplanidae

One evening we were sitting out on our back porch and I noticed that our cat, Andy Pandy, was patting at something. I turned the light on and saw a long skinny worm that had left a sticky trail. Needless to say, I immediately got

my cat away from it. I took one of the worms to the Chesapeake Extension office and it resided there in a jar on top of the file cabinet. Yes, I said one of them because unfortunately I had lots of them. They would cling to our back door and garage door when it rained. I was on a mission to hunt them down and kill them especially when I learned that they are carnivorous and eat earthworms. I probably brought them home in a flowerpot from a garden center.



Some interesting facts:

- Land planarian are native to Indo-China and have traveled to different areas of the world in the soil of potted plants.
- Description: Iridescent flat shaped with a hammer head and can grow up to 20 inches long.
- It glides along on layer of mucus that is secreted from glands on its underside.
- They are parasites and capture other invertebrates, including the earthworms, with sticky secretions which contains a neurotoxin called tetrodotoxin. They eat by extending their throat out of its mouth.
- The worms are most active during the night but can also be found early in the morning hours on wet surfaces.
- Reproduction by eggs and by regeneration. If you cut one in half, you will not kill it; you will have two!
- The land planarians are not beneficial and are considered an invasive species.

Photo Credit: Howard Garrett, Texas Tech University-The Dirt Doctor

References:

Howard Garrett, Texas Tech University-The Dirt Doctor

Les Harrison, County Extension Director, UF/IFAS Walkulla County University of Florida

Eileen Linton, Galveston County Master Gardener Extension Horticulture, Texas A&M