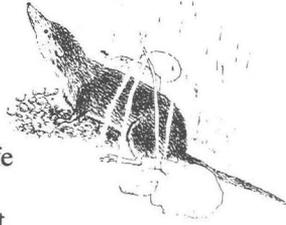


The Other Ingredient

Something strange in the forest

Some time ago, Alistair Pfeifer and John Fennessy, of the Forest and Wildlife Service, Research Section, noticed a strange thing in the Burncourt River that cuts through Glengarra Forest, Co.

Tipperary. The object was over 100mm long with a uniform thickness of no more than 1mm. The creature swam in the manner of a small snake or eel. Neither of the men could tell the creature's head from its tail — it looked simply like a piece of thin wire moving through the water. The undulating piece of wire was coaxed into a glass bottle and brought to Dublin for examination.



Very little is known about horse-hair worms. They belong to the genus *Gordius* of the obscure invertebrate phylum NEMATOMORPHA. Information about these worms is fragmentary and some of it is of doubtful pedigree. As far as can be ascertained the life history of these worms is as follows:

The adults inhabit small streams and ponds where they lay their eggs. When seen these worms commonly occur in bundles like an entanglement of horse hair floating in the water. The young gordiid worms on hatching seek out the larvae of Chironomid midges or other small aquatic insects. The worms become internal parasites of the midge larvae. When such midges hatch from the water they are commonly preyed upon by Ground Beetles. Within the body of a Ground Beetle the gordiid worm continues to grow until it reaches its full size. At this stage the beetle, now dying from the effect of the parasitic worm, seeks out a source of water at which stage the hair-worm slips from the insect's body and back into the stream or pond to lay its eggs.

(Life cycle of the gordiid worm kindly supplied by Dr. M. Speight of the Forest and Wildlife Service).