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The Prey Turned Predator

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The Prey Turned Predator

By: Lydia P.

On April 25th, 2022 at around 12:25 PM my science class at Messalonskee Middle School in Oakland, Maine went off into the school's nature trails to go back to the vernal pool that we had found. We split into pairs, one frisbee between the two of us. We were instructed to go to the edge of the vernal pool and to gather some of the water in our frisbees to try and find creatures to look at. Me, the 'lucky' one, got to take notes (I'm glad I was taking the notes; I didn't feel like getting muddy.) In one of the frisbees that had lifeforms in it, there was this midnight black long stringy thing that would **not stop** moving. By that time this **thing** had already captivated all of my interest. How does it survive? Is there a reason it moves so much and so fast? What do they eat? What eats them? So many questions left unanswered and for the speculation of my own mind.



The horsehair worm is a parasitic invertebrate that takes over the host's mind once they (the horsehair worms) are fully grown and make them kill themselves. Quite a scary concept when you think about it. Horsehair worms most commonly inhabit crickets as their host. Horsehair worms enter their host when they are larva and spend the rest of their life cycle in there until they are fully grown adult worms, this is when they kill their host. They then escape their host and live the rest of their life cycle in the water. A few scientists wondered what would happen if the horsehair worm's host was eaten by a predator. Most people would just assume the horsehair worm would die along with its host, the horsehair worm disagrees. If its host is ingested it can be seen escaping from the predator (mostly fish and frogs) from the predator's mouth or gills. Although the horsehair worm isn't indestructible, if it isn't seen beginning its escape from the mouth or gills after 5 minutes it's safe to assume that it has died along with its host.

To answer some of my previously asked questions; They feed on the nutrition/meals of their host and the host himself. It survives by finding a host while they are larva and spending their time inside their host until adulthood. While there was no clear reason for why they move so fast, I have my guess. I think it's to escape from the inside of their predators before they get digested. They don't really have predators that feed on them, their host's predators become their predators too. While I have answered many questions, more still float around. Even more arise with each question answered, like why do they mostly use crickets as hosts? Is there a specific reason? Is there a reason they are so long and thin? Is it connected to them making an escape from their predators? What happens if they don't find a host? Do they die or do they find other means to survive?

Citation

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(Pictures taken by Amanda Ripa)