

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- **Report:** Report your sightings of this worm on the statewide distribution mapping system for invasive species, ImapInvasives: NY. CapMo PRISM leads trainings on this system, feel free to contact us for more information.
- **Prevent:** Don't move soil! Check plants that you buy for the presence of these worms before planting them. Wash all heavy equipment when changing location.
- **Disposal:** Please, dispose of bait properly when fishing by tying it up in a plastic bag and throwing it out rather than emptying it on the ground. These worms were brought here for fishing because of that rapid movement. On the bright side, when fishing in areas that these worms have already invaded, their proximity to the surface make free bait readily available! Be aware that throwing unused bait into the water is not a reliable way of killing this worm.
- **Stay informed:** For news on this species and other forest pests, follow CapMo PRISM on any of our social media outlets. We are on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. (@capitalmohawkprism)



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New York State's Partnerships for Regional
Invasive Species Management (PRISMs)



Just visiting? Check out your local PRISM!
Every area in New York has a PRISM that
works in their region on invasive species man-
agement and issues.

Underground Invaders: The Crazy Snake Worm (*Amyntas agrestis*) in NY

Image courtesy of University of Vermont



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So why care about a worm?

This specific worm, identifiable by its swift snake-like movement and light coloration of the band (saddle), has spread throughout the U.S. Worms are ecosystem engineers, they can affect a wide variety of factors in a natural system from nutrient availability to seedling regeneration. It stays close to the surface and eats decomposing leaves and detritus at an alarming rate, resulting in little nutrients being available for native understory plants and native trees to regenerate. This in turn results in more invasive shrubs such as Japanese Barberry, Burning Bush, and Buckthorn occupying that space in the forest. It's a vicious cycle.

The same goes for your garden at home. These worms are so good at what they do that they are reported to decompose mulch. They have been known to destroy flower gardens and landscape plantings. They are expensive to have in a garden and they can result in more invaded forests like the one seen above.

WHATS AT STAKE:

Hardwood forests, like those that make up a 90% of New York's forests, show the most dramatic decreases in biodiversity once invaded by these pests. Species such as the Pink Lady's Slipper, which rely on fungal interaction to survive, are extremely negatively affected. These worms quickly destroy the relatively unstudied fungal links between organisms on the forest floor, resulting in vast changes in forest composition.

Gardeners, hikers, cyclists, homeowners, and more face a common enemy in the Amynths worm. Unfortunately containment and prevention are some of the only options at this point to fight this infestation until more research on how to remove the worm and its negative effects can be done.



Pink Lady Slipper (Cypripedium acaule) and other orchid species are at higher risk from invasive worms.

HOW DID IT GET HERE?

It is believed that the crazy snake worm arrived here to be used as fishing bait more than 50 years ago. The worm does not travel far distances on its own, so the rapid spread of the species is attributed to dirt being moved via nurseries, construction, landscaping, and any other industry that involves the transport of plants or dirt.

Here in the Northeast, glacial movement resulted in forests evolving without any earthworm presence at all. Over time various European worms have made their way into our natural areas, but the Amynths worm is a different sort of beast. It works much quicker than other species of worm, resulting in forests losing the leaf litter where many nutrients and microbial interactions would naturally occur. These worms send our native plants (which our native wildlife depends on for habitat and food) into a negative spiral that is irreversible at this point in time.



Exposed tree roots are an indicator that a forest has been invaded by these Asian earthworms.