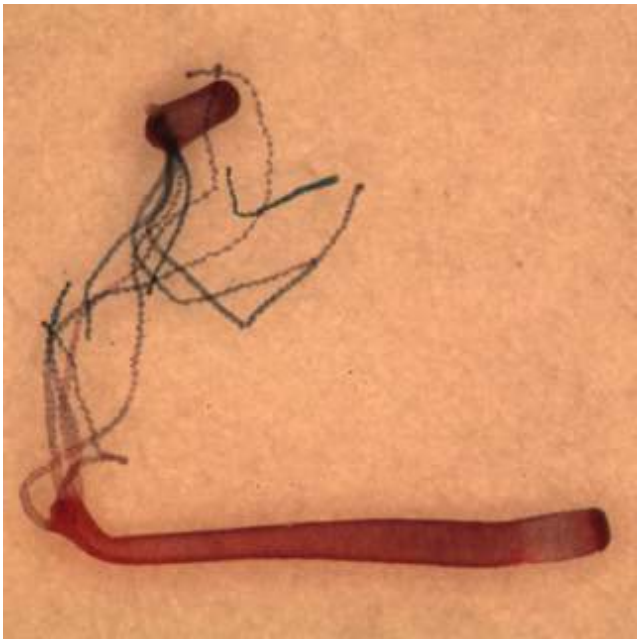

hydra

representative species

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Cnidaria - hydras
Class:	Hydrozoa

Features

Hydras are less than one-half inch tall. Their saclike body is made of two layers of cells. They have radial symmetry, with tentacles surrounding the single opening of the gastrovascular cavity. Stinging cells are present on the tentacles. The body may be gray, brown, white, or green.

Natural History

Hydras live attached to submerged vegetation, leaves, or rocks in clear waters of ponds, lagoons, rivers, and lakes. They eat other small invertebrates, such as microscopic crustaceans and worms. Hydras use stinging cells in their tentacles to inject a toxin into prey that touch them. The toxin paralyzes the prey swiftly, which is necessary because the hydra could not follow it to catch it. They use tentacles to draw prey into their gastrovascular cavity for digestion. They move in two ways: by somersaulting and by an inch-worm type of movement. They reproduce both sexually and asexually. Most are hermaphrodites, producing both eggs and sperm, but at different times. The fertilized eggs are covered with a shell-like cyst to overwinter and new hydra hatch in the spring. Asexually, they reproduce by budding.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.