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Invertebrate of the Month

August 2007



Velvet Worms

Belonging to the phylum Onychophora, velvet worms are an ancient link between arthropods (e.g. centipedes and insects) and annelids (segmented worms) and probably one of the first animals to “walk” on land. Fossils of marine relatives of the Onychophora have been found dating back 500 million years and the current animals have not changed much since Pangean times. These curious creatures live in rotting wood, leaf litter and under bark and stones in moist forests. They are voracious carnivores and often immobilize prey by spitting slime from glands in their head. Velvet worms usually range from 2-10 cm long, those from Australia being much smaller than their tropical relatives. The specimen pictured above is only 4 mm long and was found in litter from an experimental plot near Walpole.