

## Freshwater, Marine and Terrestrial Leeches Guild

**New England Medicinal Leech** *Macrobdella sestertia*

“A terrestrial leech” *Haemopsis septagon*

**Biannulate Leech** *Placobdella biannulata*

“A marine leech” *Branchellion ravenelii*

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### New England Medicinal Leech

*Macrobdella sestertia*

The New England Medicinal Leech was described in 1886 from Massachusetts, then was not collected there again until 1976 (Smith 1977). A single specimen was collected nearly two decades later in Maine with a total of only 5 specimens collected in the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith and Hanlon 1997). In 2008, 9 specimens of this species were collected in South Carolina streams (Poly 2011), representing a significant expansion of its known distribution from Massachusetts. Later, 2 additional specimens were found in museum collections (Poly pers. obs.). In South Carolina, the New England Medicinal Leech has been collected only in Edgefield County. It is a species of Special Concern in Massachusetts and has a global rank of imperiled (G2) and a state rank of critically imperiled (S1) in Massachusetts and South Carolina (NatureServe 2011). Almost nothing is known about the natural history of this species; less than 20 individuals have been collected since its description over 120 years ago, and its known distribution is spotty.

### “A terrestrial leech”

*Haemopsis septagon*

In South Carolina, the terrestrial leech, *Haemopsis septagon*, has been found at only one site in Georgetown County (Sawyer and Shelley 1976). While it is a terrestrial species, it prefers moist areas near water sources and feeds on earthworms; little else is known about its natural history (Sawyer 1979, Shelley et al. 1979). It has a broader distribution in North Carolina, and there is a single record from Virginia (Sawyer and Shelley 1976, Shelley et al. 1979). It probably occurs more widely in the Coastal Plain of South Carolina, and its known distribution might be limited due to lack of effort. Basic surveys are needed to assess the distribution and abundance of this species in South Carolina (Sawyer 1979). It was recommended for Special Concern status by Sawyer (1979). This species does not have any conservation rank currently assigned to it.

### Biannulate Leech

*Placobdella biannulata*

This species is found free-living and as a parasite on salamanders of the genus *Desmognathus*. Until recently, it had been referred to by the name *Oligobdella biannulata* for over 80 years. In South Carolina it has been found only in the Blue Ridge Ecoregion in Oconee, Pickens, and Greenville Counties (Sawyer and Shelley 1976; Moser et al. 2005), and Sawyer (1979) recommended Special Concern status for the species. New information on its life history and

distribution was provided by Moser et al. (2005). The species occurs in a relatively small area that encompasses portions of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee (Moser et al. 2005). This species does not have any conservation rank currently assigned to it.

**“A marine leech”**

*Branchellion ravenelii*

This marine leech was described by Girard in 1850 from Charleston, South Carolina. It is a parasite of rays and skates and occurs along the southeastern Atlantic Coast to the Gulf of Mexico, although has not been found in South Carolina recently (Sawyer et al. 1975, Sawyer 1979). Sawyer (1979) recommended state endangered status for the species. It is possibly present in South Carolina but appears rare due to lack of attention or is at the northern edge of its range. This species does not have any conservation rank currently assigned to it.

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