

EXTRAORDINARY EARTHWORMS

by Sean O'Connor
photographs by Aaron Beck

*Ready
to Read*

EXTRAORDINARY EARTHWORMS

by Sean O'Connor • photographs by Aaron Beck

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Small but important

In your garden, there could be more than a quarter of a million earthworms!

Earthworms might be small, but they are very important. They make the soil healthy for plants to grow.



Below the surface

We don't see earthworms very often because sunlight is harmful to them and they live underground.

Below the surface, they are quietly tunnelling and eating their way through the soil. Their tunnels allow air and water to move through the soil more easily. This helps plants to grow strong and healthy.

Worms create tunnels as they move through the soil.

Making rich soil

Earthworms eat rotting plants found in the soil, in compost heaps, or in worm farms.

They produce **casts** (earthworm poo) and worm wee from whatever they eat. The casts are full of good things that help plants grow and provide food for other small animals.

An earthworm can eat its own weight every day. That's like you eating more than 150 bananas!



Worms casts are good for the soil.



Some people put their kitchen and garden waste in a worm farm.

Worm farms

Some people set up worm farms to collect the casts and worm wee. These can be added to your garden to improve the soil.

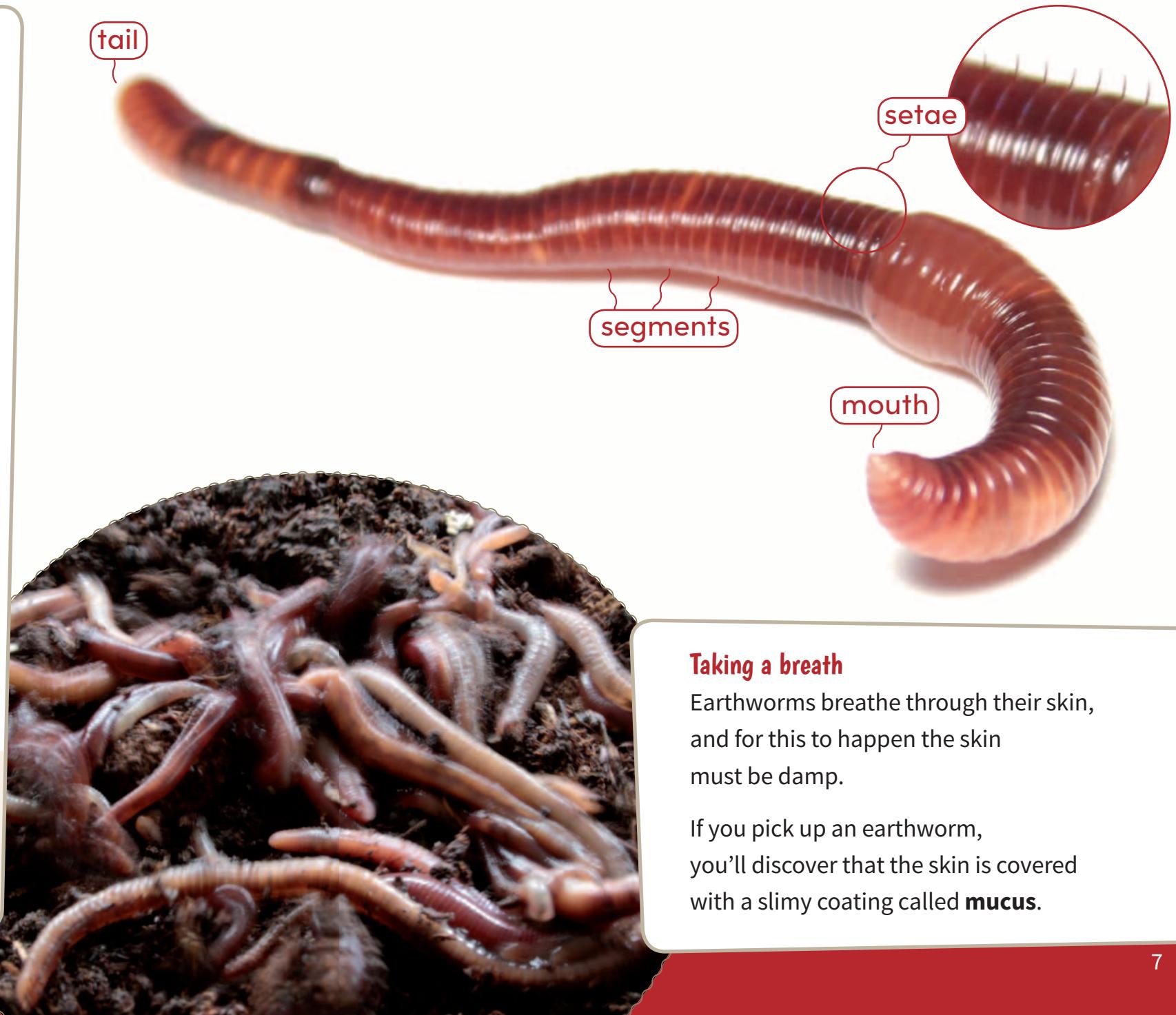
Moving along

The earthworm's body is made up of sections. These sections are called **segments**. Some earthworms have more than five hundred segments!

Earthworms don't have bones, arms, or legs. Their long, narrow shape helps them move through the soil easily.

But without legs, how can an earthworm move? Earthworms move by stretching and shortening the powerful muscles in their bodies. Bristles called **setae** (set-ee) are on each segment. The setae provide grip as the earthworms move through the soil.

For their size, earthworms are among the strongest animals on Earth!



Taking a breath

Earthworms breathe through their skin, and for this to happen the skin must be damp.

If you pick up an earthworm, you'll discover that the skin is covered with a slimy coating called **mucus**.

All sorts of earthworms

New Zealand has about two hundred species of earthworms.

Next time you run across your lawn, think about all the earthworms munching away below, improving the soil as they go. Extraordinary!



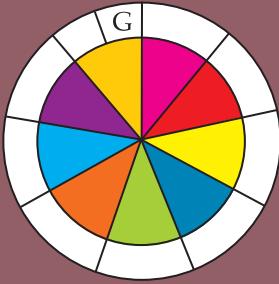
The grey worm is the most common earthworm in New Zealand.



Tiger worms prefer to live in compost heaps and worm farms.



The North Auckland worm can grow up to 1.3 metres long.



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To go directly to audio and TSM for this book, scan the QR code or use the short URL.



Extraordinary
Earthworms

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