Invertebrate facts

Tiny animals without backbones first appeared more than 600 million years ago. These early invertebrates lived in water, and many still do. Today, the diversity of invertebrates found throughout the world is staggering, from squids and starfish to worms and spiders.

INVERTEBRATE **TYPES**

There are around 35 main groups of species in the animal kingdom. Just one of these groups, the vertebrates, contains all the fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. The other 34 groups are invertebrates – animals without an internal, jointed skeleton. Six of the main invertebrate groups are shown here.

Sponges
These primitive ocean organsims cannot move, and gather food by filtering it from the water.

Cnidarians
From jellyfish and anemones to corals, these sea creatures all have stinging tentacles to catch small prey.

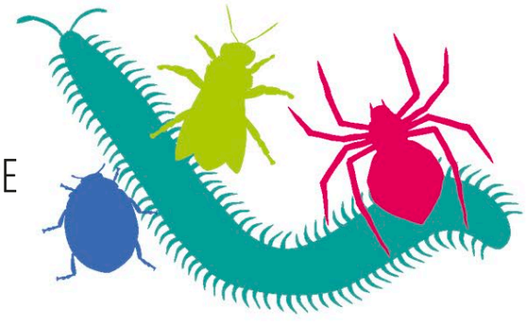
Echinoderms
With their "spiny skin", these marine animals include starfish, sea cucumbers, and sea urchins.

Molluscs
From slugs to squids, molluscs live in damp habitats or in the sea. Many have a hard shell.

Worms
Found in water and on land, some – such as earthworms – are made up of many identical, soft-skinned segments.

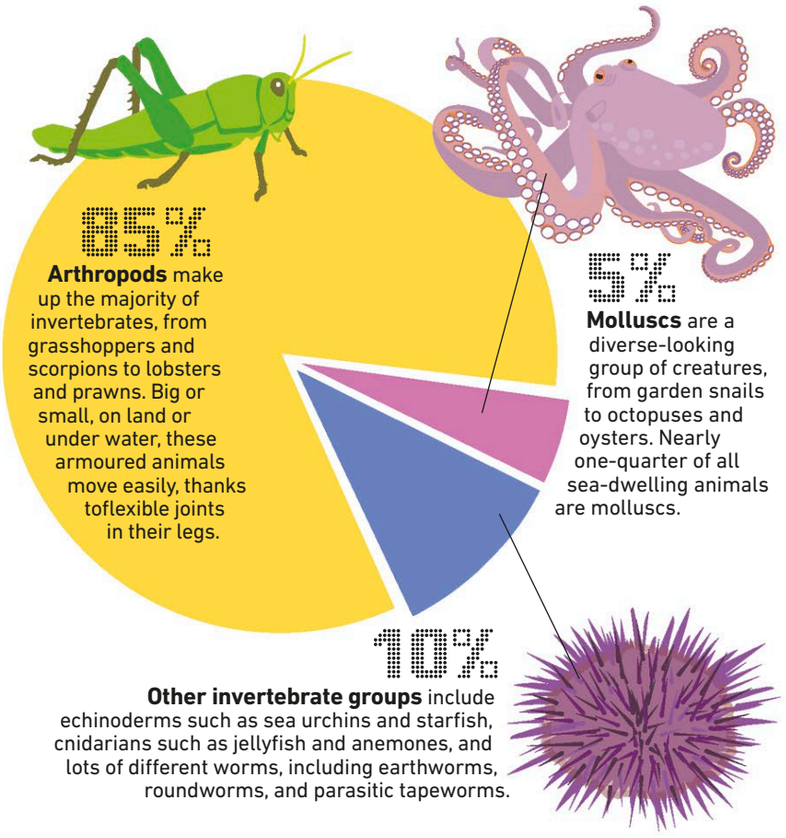
Arthropods
With their tough outer skeletons and jointed legs, arthropods include insects, spiders, and crabs.

ALMOST
97%
OF ALL ANIMALS ARE **INVERTEBRATES**.



INVERTEBRATE **NUMBERS**

There are approximately 1.3 million known invertebrate species, but there could be many millions more. The vast majority of invertebrates belong to two groups: arthropods and molluscs.



85%
Arthropods make up the majority of invertebrates, from grasshoppers and scorpions to lobsters and prawns. Big or small, on land or under water, these armoured animals move easily, thanks toflexible joints in their legs.

5%
Molluscs are a diverse-looking group of creatures, from garden snails to octopuses and oysters. Nearly one-quarter of all sea-dwelling animals are molluscs.

10%
Other invertebrate groups include echinoderms such as sea urchins and starfish, cnidarians such as jellyfish and anemones, and lots of different worms, including earthworms, roundworms, and parasitic tapeworms.

EXTREME HABITATS

Some invertebrates can withstand – and even thrive – in incredibly hostile conditions, from barren, icy Antarctica to vast, unexplored regions thousands of metres below the ocean's surface.

Antarctic midges are insects that measure only 1 cm (⅜ in), yet are the largest native land animal in Antarctica. They live at temperatures of -15°C (5°F), spending nine months of the year frozen solid.

Tube worms, a type of marine segmented worm, live on the Pacific Ocean seafloor near hydrothermal vents – volcanic areas where sections of Earth's crust are moving apart. They grow up to 3 m (10 ft).