

## Perspective

## THE IMPACT AND FUNCTIONAL ROLES OF NEMATODES IN ECOSYSTEMS

Maria Cristina\*

Department of Marine Biology, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

## INTRODUCTION

Nematoda, also known as roundworms, are a phylum of elongated, cylindrical, and mostly microscopic animals that are widely distributed in various habitats such as soil, freshwater, and marine environments. They play a crucial role in the functioning of ecosystems, serving as both decomposers and parasites. In this article, we will delve into the world of Nematoda and explore their biology, classification, ecological significance, and impact on human life.

Nematoda are elongated and worm-like in shape, with a smooth and flexible cuticle that covers their body. Their body shape allows them to move efficiently through soil and other environments. They possess a digestive system that includes an oral opening and an anus, which allows them to feed on a variety of organic matter, including bacteria, fungi, and plant material. They also have a simple nervous system, consisting of a nerve ring around the esophagus and lateral nerve cords that run along the length of their body [1]. Nematoda is a large and diverse phylum, with over 28,000 species described to date. They are classified into four main groups: free-living, plant parasites, animal parasites, and bacteriovores. Free-living Nematoda play a crucial role in soil dynamics, as they decompose dead organic matter, recycle nutrients, and provide food for other organisms. Plant-parasitic Nematoda feed on plant roots and cause significant damage to crops, while animal-parasitic Nematoda can cause diseases in both livestock and humans. Bacteriovores, on the other hand, feed on bacteria, playing a role in controlling bacterial populations in soil and water environments.

Nematoda play a vital role in the functioning of ecosystems, as they participate in nutrient cycling and control the populations of other organisms. They help to break down dead organic matter, allowing the release of nutrients back into the soil. This process of nutrient cycling is essential for maintaining the health of soils and promoting the growth of plants. Nematoda also play a role in controlling populations of other organisms, such as bacteria and fungi. By consuming bacteria and fungi, they help to regulate the balance of these populations, preventing the spread of diseases and promoting the overall health of the ecosystem [2]. Nematoda have both positive and negative impacts on human life. On the one hand, they play a crucial role in the food chain, serving as a source of food for other organisms and helping to control the populations of harmful organisms such as bacteria and fungi. On the other hand, some species of

Nematoda can cause diseases in humans, animals, and plants. For example, plant-parasitic nematodes can cause significant damage to crops, reducing yields and affecting food security. Animal-parasitic nematodes, such as *Ascaris lumbricoides* and *Trichinella spiralis*, can cause diseases in humans, while others, such as *Haemonchus contortus* and *Ostertagia ostertagi*, can cause diseases in livestock [3].

Nematodes have a long, slender, cylindrical body with a distinct head and tail end. They are pseudocoelomates, meaning they have a fluid-filled body cavity that is not completely lined with mesoderm. Most nematodes are free-living and feed on bacteria, fungi, or other small organisms. Some are predators and feed on other nematodes. Some nematodes have specialized structures for feeding and reproduction, such as stylet for feeding and copulatory spicules for mating. Nematodes are important indicators of soil health and have been used in bioremediation to help clean up contaminated soil [4]. In medicine, nematodes are used as model organisms for studying development and genetics, and some species are being researched as potential sources of new drugs. Some nematodes are also of economic importance as pests in crops and livestock, causing significant losses to agriculture. Some nematodes can form symbiotic relationships with plants, fixing atmospheric nitrogen for their host. Nematodes have a simple nervous system, with a nerve ring and longitudinal nerve cords, and are capable of simple forms of learning and memory [5].

In Conclusion Nematoda are a diverse and widespread phylum of organisms that play a crucial role in the functioning of ecosystems. They serve as decomposers, parasites, and bacteriovores, and play a role in nutrient cycling and the regulation of other organism populations. Although some species of Nematoda can cause diseases in humans and animals, they also have positive impacts, such as serving as a source of food for other organisms and controlling the populations of harmful organisms.

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\*Corresponding author: Maria Cristina, Department of Marine Biology, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden, E-mail: cristinamaria763@ug.se

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