

## shipworm lifecycle

Written by Kai Hoppe - Last Updated Thursday, 22 February 2018 09:47

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Life starts for *Teredo navalis* after internal fertilization as a typical bivalve larva inside its mothers gill chamber. Here it can after a „placental reaction“ be nourished by its parent and grows to the veliger stage and a size of about 70  $\mu\text{m}$ . Together with thousands or up to 2 million siblings the larva is expelled to find a new environment, i.e. a new piece of wood.



The trip takes two or three weeks and depends on the surrounding water currents. Like many other mollusc larvae *Teredo* lives on a diet of microalgae. In fact it is almost indistinguishable from other bivalves at this stage.

Once the larvae is „ripe“ for settlement, it can locate logs by „smelling“ decomposing wood and actively swimming the last few centimeters. It crawls with its foot on the surface to find a suitable location, where it attaches itself with a single byssus strand. Now starts a rather miraculous boring action. The larval shell is not calcified and therefore quite soft, so that it cannot be a functional borer. Instead it is speculated that the larva can soften wood with the aid of maternal enzymes and then excavate a small hole with its foot. In there *Teredo* metamorphoses to its adult shipworm form.

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