

COWGATE CEMETERY Deborah Gasking

The Power of Three

One of the most important animals in the world is the earthworm, collectively known as 'clew' from Old English 'cliwen' meaning 'ball of yarn or thread'. More of how they can save us from our trespass later, but for now more of what I've noticed in the quirky strangeness in their power of three.

- There are thought to be about 3000 different species worldwide.
- 3 categories of earthworm:
 - > Surface dwellers, about 3cm long, which live on decaying organic layer.
 - > Shallow burrowers, about 15cm long, half of the 30cm depth of soil they live in.
 - > Deep burrowers, up to 30cm long and burrow as deeply as 3m.
- The largest concentration of the largest UK earthworm, on the Scottish Isle of Rum, can be 3 times heavier than our mainland species.
- The longest earthworm, found in Victoria, Australia, can reach 3m.
- Earthworms can mate for up to 3 hours.
- The female worm's fertility drops off markedly after 3 years.
- Earthworms live for about 6 years.

Wonderful Worms

- Aerate soil, reducing run-off from heavy rains.
- Fix carbon deep in the soil, up to 3 metres.



Cowgate Cemetery 2008

- Fertilize the soil by:
 - > Constantly eating decaying matter, constantly excreting and thus constantly fertilising.
 - > Love leaf litter, dragging it down into the soil, churning and mixing into the earth.

Sad Farmland

Up to 40% of agricultural land has poor earthworm biodiversity. Pesticides, ploughing, and monoculture have massive impact on numbers which in turn has a massive impact on wildlife that depend on worms for food, which has a massive impact on biodiversity and our own survival.

Cowgate and Worms

So! what have worms this to do with our beloved Cowgate? With this knowledge about earthworms means we are doing a grand job in how we manage these precious acres. For some time now, we have operated a no rake approach, leaving all grass and leaf fall where it lands, beneficial to:

- Nature's creatures who depend on the worm for food.
- The area is a good carbon sink.
- Preventing run-off rain from our recent downpours, reducing flooding.

If we can't influence farming practice, we can do our bit in our gardens with:

- Good management of lawns, flower beds and vegetable plots. Not to be too tidy and taking a no-dig approach which is easier on your back and easier on nature.
- Not smothering our precious soil with plastic carpets (artificial grass) or concrete.

We are back to our twice-monthly sorties giving our green space, and our own health, some well-deserved and belated TLC.