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Volume 47, Issues 5-6, 2003, Pages 924-933

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Summary

In 1838 Darwin published his first paper on earthworms, showing their importance for bioturbation and the burial of surface-lying objects, and placing him as a pioneer of soil science. In October 1881, nearly 44 years after writing his first paper, and about 6 months before his death, Darwin published his last book, "The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms with Observations on their Habits." The book was a best seller at the time and can be considered a historical turning point in the perception of the importance of earthworms by humans, especially farmers, gardeners and scientists. Despite its great popularity, however, there were (and still are) criticisms regarding Darwin's broad statements and conclusions, and the book did not

reach, throughout the 20th century, the popularity of his other masterworks. Nonetheless, *“Worms”* dealt masterfully with topics such as earthworm intelligence (responsible in a great part for the book's popularity) and importance in the biogeospheric cycles. Darwin's book attributed intelligence and benevolence to earthworms, changing the notion that earthworms were only dumb, undesirable pests and a general nuisance. Although later research showed that Darwin's statements regarding intelligence were exaggerated and his experiments inaccurately attributed intelligence where instincts predominated, today, more than 120 years later, Darwin's conclusions continue to challenge scientists following in his footsteps, seeking to prove or disprove his ideas.



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Key words

Charles Darwin; earthworms; behavior; soil ecology; perceptions on worms

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