Heartworm is a serious, life-threatening disease of dogs and a major cause of heart disease in cats. It is due to the presence of the adult stage of the parasite, *Dirofilaria immitis*, in the pulmonary arteries and right ventricle of the heart. It is found almost everywhere in the continental United States.

1. **Mosquito Bite**
   - When a mosquito bites, it injects the microfilariae into a new dog.

2. **Migration**
   - Small, microscopic worms migrate under the skin and eventually enter the dog’s bloodstream. About 6 months after the initial mosquito bite, the microfilariae arrive at the heart.

3. **Maturation**
   - The adult worms live in the pulmonary arteries and right side of the heart, where they can survive for seven years and eventually mate. The female releases large amounts of small, microscopic “microfilariae” into the bloodstream.

**Species of Mosquitoes**

70 species of mosquitoes are capable of spreading heartworm disease.

**Adult Heartworms**

12 in. long!