

Woodlouse



“sow bug”

Trachelipus rathkii

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Woodlice, also known as “sow bugs” are a fairly common sight in wooded North American areas, especially the eastern half.

Native to Central Europe, these critters are not actually insects, but instead are classified as arthropods. They are often confused with “pill bugs” because of their similar appearance, but are unable to roll into a ball.

Woodlice are a member of the class *Crustacea*, which also includes aquatic species such as lobsters and crabs. Because of their origins from the water, they prefer moist environments and are commonly found under fallen logs and leaves in damp forested areas. Woodlice have gills on the underside of their abdomen where gas exchange occurs.

Sow bugs are both omnivores and scavengers. They most commonly consume decaying organic material. On occasion they will also eat living plants. For this reason some people consider them a pest, but they cause no physical harm to humans. Their lifespan is longer than expected. They generally live upwards of three years. Maturity is reached after one year.

The body is composed of three main segments, the head, thorax, and abdomen. Seven pairs of jointed legs are used for mobility, and they have one pair of large, main antennae. They also have a tail-like appendage on the posterior end of their body. A hard, shell-like exoskeleton protects the soft and vulnerable underside of their body. This is composed of overlapping plates that resemble armor. These body plates can widely vary on color, pattern, and texture.



head and main pair of antennae



jointed legs



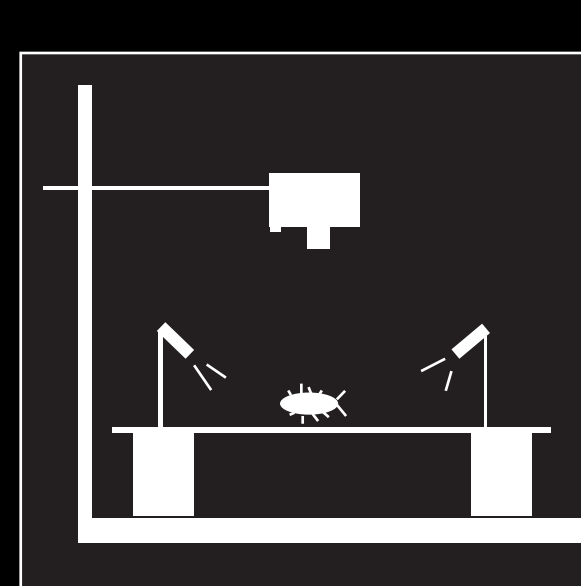
tail appendages and gills



multiple patterns, colors, and textures throughout different specimens

Photography

Images were photographed using a Canon 5D Mark II camera with a Canon 65mm macro lens. The camera was mounted on a copy stand above the subject. The specimens were placed on a sheet of glass which was raised above the base of the stand using wooden blocks. Beneath the stand was a solid black background. Fiber optic lighting was used on each side of the specimen for even illumination. Specimens were captured live in Rochester, NY and then placed into rubbing alcohol before photographing. After capture, the images were stacked using Photoshop CS5.5 to achieve maximum focus.



http://www.cirrusimage.com/isopoda_sow_bug.htm
<http://crawford.tardigrade.net/bugs/BugofMonth17.html>
<http://hammondandlemmons.com/Sowbug.html>
<http://insected.arizona.edu/isoinfo.htm>

All photographs taken and edited by Emily Morse thanks to Biomedical Photographic Communications facilities at the Rochester Institute of Technology



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