

WATER BOATMEN



WATER BOATMAN

Though they are not a year-round food source for stillwater trout; there are however, periods during the open water season (early spring & fall) where fish focus on water boatmen and take them with ferocity.

Species:

Water boatmen belong to the the order of insects classified as *Hemiptera*. They spend portions of their lives in the water, on land and in the air. There are over 100 species in this order of insects that frequent North American stillwaters. These stillwater beetles are a must in any fly-fisher's box.

Description:

Initially, waterboatmen would (to the untrained eye) look like any ordinary beetle. At closer inspection, one can see that members of these species each possess a pair of long paddle-like legs which help these insects scoot around the water in short, choppy bursts of 3-8 cm in length. The shell-like backs of boatmen are actually folded wings. Adults are capable of flight, but usually only use this ability during specific times of the year. Water boatmen must breathe air, so when prolonged periods under water are necessary, they will use small hairs on the bottom of their bodies to trap an air bubble that they can hold while swimming. This gives the insect a distinct silvery glow on their underside. Boatmen have dark brown, dark olive or black backs, and light olive, yellow or dark olive underbodies. The average length of a water boatman would be ½ of a centimetre to about two centimetres.

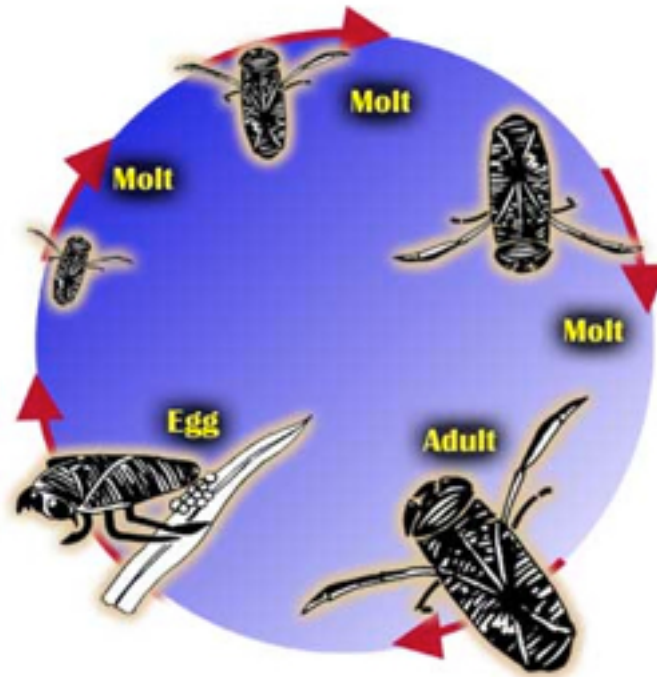
Preferred Habitat:

Due to the fact that they are air breathers, water boatmen are confined to shallower areas of lakes (3 metres or less). They swim in and around shoals and particularly in areas that have abundant plant life. Alkaline lakes tend to support more water boatmen than neutral or more acidic waters.

Seasonal Availability:

APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER
✓	✓				✓	✓

Life Cycle:



Water boatmen have an incomplete life cycle. Females dive to the bottom and lay their eggs amidst the plants and debris. The eggs soon hatch, and the nymphs grow through a gradual process. This process sees the nymphs proceed through a series of 5 “instars” (a molting of the outer shell as it becomes too small). Boatmen reach maturity in either the late fall or early spring one year after hatching from the eggs. The adult stage is also the only period of a boatman’s life that it is able to fly. After mating, females will dive-bomb back into the water to deposit their eggs. En masse, this display can be impressive, and appear like it is raining over the lake shallows

Water Boatmen and the Food Chain:

Water boatmen are omnivores feeding on various aquatic plants as well as aquatic invertebrates. Their close cousins (called backswimmers) are only predators, and feed exclusively on insects and other aquatic creatures. Backswimmers look very similar to water boatmen; however, backswimmers can deliver a nasty bite (similar to a wasp sting), so handling boatmen may not be a good idea (in case you are holding an angry cousin). Trout will gorge themselves on these species during the early spring and fall. These are the times when the mature nymphs scoot to the surface to fly away from the water, or when pregnant females rain down onto the water and swim to the bottom to deposit their eggs.

