

## Woodlice

(45+ species, most commonly *Oniscus asellus*, *Porcellio scaber*, *Philoscia muscorum*, *Armadillidium vulgare*)

### Size

3-30 mm long, usually about 12mm

### Favourite Food

Mostly decaying plant material, bacteria and fungus but will graze paper in damp areas

### What to look for

Larva - Kept in a brood pouch by the mother, emerging as miniature adults which moult and grow

Adult - A flattened oval, grey or brown, segmented shell, 7 pairs of legs, jointed antenna. Some can curl up.

A relic from a time when dinosaurs roamed the earth, more than 100 million years ago, woodlice have changed very little since they first evolved to live on land.



Common Striped Woodlouse  
AJC1 2018 CC BY-SA 2.0

Most species need a **damp habitat** and that is the clue to their very useful function in a museum.

If you see woodlice in an area you know that there is a source of dampness nearby or that they are entering the building for shelter and there are quite large gaps allowing them in. **Look for leaking pipes, damp masonry, blocked gutters or drains and gaps under doors or in window frames, cracks in mortar or render.**

### How are they a pest?

Once in the museum, woodlice can be a pest in two ways.

1. They may consider any damp cellulose to be a suitable substitute for decaying plants and can **graze the surface of paper, destroying any image or writing on it**. This can be a problem if vital information on box labels has been eaten.
2. They are a good source of **protein for other predators** which could be attracted to the area and then, when they have finished the woodlouse body, attack the collection.

## Top tips:

- You may hear woodlice referred to by a host of nicknames, mostly depending on the UK region – these can include Chuggy pigs, Doddamees, Grammasows, Gramfa gravies, Slaters, Roly Polys etc.
- If you are unsure about how to deal with any pests in your collection or store, contact a conservator (or Conservation Development Officer in the SW) for advice.

## Look for Spiders

You may find the Woodlouse spider, *Dysdera crocata*, in pest traps.

This distinctive spider with a glossy red-brown head and large jaws is often a good indicator that there are woodlice nearby, so are also a helpful reminder to check for damp areas or gaps in the museum's own protective shell.

For more information on spiders in your collection, head to our resources page.



Woodlouse Spider © Mark Pajak 2019



Woodlice [Woodlouse - Amanda Jane Fletcher](#) 2007 CC BY-SA 2.0

## Prevention and Removal

The best way to deal with woodlice is to keep the museum **dry and well-sealed**. They are easy to sweep up and remove and dead bodies should be cleared up promptly.

Live woodlice can be gently gathered up and returned to the wild to carry on their useful function of processing dead plant material.

We have to admire these tiny beasts which have been on the planet far longer than humans!

See our associated guides to identifying and treating museum pests on our [resources page](#).

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