

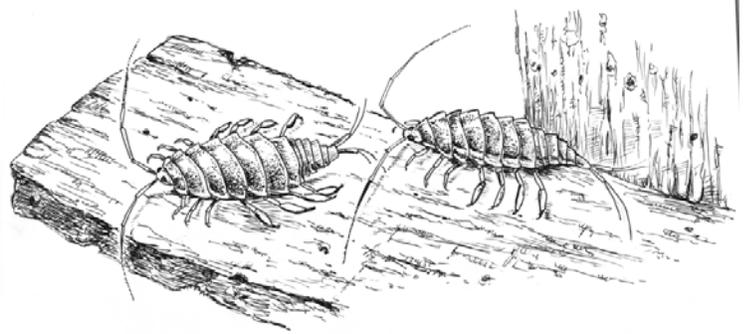
Sea Roaches – The Bay’s Garbage Disposals

What are they?

Sea roaches are tiny isopods that live on the land.

Like lobsters and crabs, isopods are crustaceans, or animals that have a hard outer shell to support them instead of a skeleton of bones. *Iso* means “same” and *pod* means foot. That means their jointed legs (all 14 of them!) are all the same. They look the same and function in the same way.

Sea roaches got their name because they look something like common cockroaches.



What do they look like?

Sea roaches are about an inch long. Their hard gray bodies look like a series of connected tubes. They have two sets of antennas on their heads. One is very large and one is very small. They use their antennas to explore their environment. They breathe through gills and must make sure their gills stay wet in order to work properly.

These tiny isopods resemble sow bugs and pill bugs that you can find under rocks or fallen tree limbs on land.

Where can you find them?

Sea roaches are often spotted crawling over rocks, piers, and jetties just above the water line.

How do they behave?

Sea roaches are considered to be scavengers. They generally eat dead plants and animals, breaking them down into smaller bits. By doing this, scavengers help keep an ecosystem free of rotting materials.

Sea roaches are very active at night. During the day, they hide under rocks and other structures. They move very quickly in order to avoid predators.

What do they eat?

Sea roaches eat dead and decaying plants and animals.

What eats them?

Fish and birds often eat sea roaches.

Creature Feature

The Bay’s sea roaches have a relative that lives in the Arctic. However, these sea roaches are about four times the size of the sea roaches found in the Chesapeake Bay. Scientists are investigating to find out why these Arctic isopods are so large.