Wild About…

Creepy Crawlies
Nature notes

Gardens and woodlands are full of mini-beasts. These invertebrates include snails (see Night-time Wildlife), woodlice, and other creepy crawlies. These are great for wildlife studies, and allow field survey equipment to be put to the test. Mini-beasts live in the soil, on trees, in vegetation, under rocks - all over the place!

Woodlice wonders

There were 37 species of woodlice in the UK (last time anyone counted), and most woodlice are easy to identify. Woodlice are just some of the creepy crawlies you might encounter in the garden, or in areas near where you live.

Woodlice are nocturnal, so they are active at night, and sleep and hide themselves away during the day. Because of this, wherever you choose to carry out your survey, you will have to search carefully.

You can see them in the garden, if you look under rotting wood or in dark, damp, places. Try looking under moveable objects such as logs and rocks, and in cracks and crevices. Remember to replace the log or rock so that woodlice, and other creatures, can continue to use it.

You can decide where you want to do your survey. Here are some examples of areas to try:
- buildings
- garden
- waste ground
- grassland
- woodland
- coastal

If you are looking at the wonders of woodlice, you will need to use a key to help you identify them. Some woodlice are rare, and only found in a few places around the country. Others are very small, and/or live in the soil. These woodlice are difficult to find and harder to identify.

Creepy Crawlies
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Creepy Crawlies

**woodlouse wizard** an identification key

**does it have long tails?**

- are you on the seashore?
  - yes
  - no
- does it have long 'tails'?
  - yes
  - no
  - common sea slater
    - Ligia oceanica

**can it roll into a ball?**

- yes
- no

**does it roll up completely, leaving no gap?**

- yes
- no
  - common pill woodlouse
    - Armadillidium vulgare
  - Armadillidium nasatum

**does it have a clear darker stripe down its back?**

- yes
- no
  - Common striped woodlouse
    - Philoscia muscorum

**is it shiny?**

- yes
- no

**is it longer than 5mm?**

- yes
- no
  - common shiny woodlouse
    - Oniscus asellus
  - common pygmy woodlouse
    - Trichorhina pusilla
  - common rough woodlouse
    - Porcellio scaber
How to watch

You can collect creepy crawlies using your sweep net in vegetation, using a pooter, or by knocking them from trees and bushes into your beating tray.

To collect beetles and mini-beasts that run along the ground, you can build a pitfall trap. Conduct a minibeast hunt around your garden. Take bug boxes, hand lenses, pitfall traps, and other materials, to identify species you see.

The best way to handle creepy crawlies is to get them to walk onto:

- a damp paint brush
- a plastic spoon
- a piece of paper

Transfer them to a bug viewer, or other small container. If you plan to keep them for a short time, make sure your container has some dead leaves, damp moss, or grass.

Have a look at your mini-best catch. Do you recognise everything you have found? Look at how your mini-beast feed. Watch out, as some are carnivores, and might eat others in your bug pot. After you have identified the woodlice or mini-beasts, release them where you found them.

To identify an animal, plant, or insect correctly, classification keys are often used. A classification key is a flowchart that contains questions about a group of animals. By answering the questions, you will be led to the name of the animal you are trying to identify. Questions must be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no'. Here are two keys for some of the ground-living mini-beasts you might find.

These do not include all creepy crawlies you might find. To identify species not shown, you will need to use an identification book.

Creepy Crawlies

The identification keys are reproduced from a series of Wildlife Watch Activity books for adult leaders, written by Jane De'ath and Anne Heaton, and illustrated by Elaine Nipper and Miranda Grey.
In your nature diary

Produce a list of the mini-beasts and woodlice species you find in your chosen area. If, for example, you are just looking at woodlice, you could identify individual woodlice as you find them, or collect woodlice that appear different from each other and identify them at the end. You could draw pictures in your nature diary of what you find.

It is important to record:

- a list of the mini-beasts and woodlice species
- a name for the area and type of habitat (e.g. garden, grassland)
- the full post code of the site where you found species e.g. LE4 4DG, or a six-figure grid reference (see the Recording Wildlife section)
- the date

Put your findings in a recording sheet similar to the one below. You could transfer data into a chart or graph, perhaps comparing habitats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creepy crawly</th>
<th>Number found</th>
<th>What kind of habitat? (Light/ dark/ Damp/ Dry etc)</th>
<th>What were they doing?</th>
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What to do
Wonders of Woodlice

If you want to carry out a study to find out about woodlice, you need to think of questions you might want to answer. This could include:

- Where do woodlice live?
- How many different kinds of woodlice live near you?
- Which are the most widespread species?
- Do different kinds of woodlice live in different places?

Once you have chosen an area, you need to collect woodlice, and identify which species you have found using the key included in this pack. This was developed as part of a national project called “Walking with Woodlice” which was run by the Natural History Museum in London in 2001.

Mini-beast Magic

Once you have collected a number of specimens, draw a picture of your animal in your Nature Diary. Then, try and answer the following questions for each mini-beast:

- Name of your animal (Use an identification book or key to help you identify it. If after this you still can’t identify it with it’s real name, have a good a making one up which fits it!)
- What colour is it?
- Is the body hard or soft?
- Is the body in segments? Yes or No — If yes, how many segments can you see?
- How many legs does it have?
- Does it have wings? Yes or No (Check carefully, some animals have wings covered by hard cases on the back – look for the join)
- How does it move along the ground?

Now that you have seen a simple Classification Key see if you can make a similar one of your own for the specimens you collected.
GRASSLAND MINIBEASTS
MINIBEASTS KEY (for ground-living creatures)