

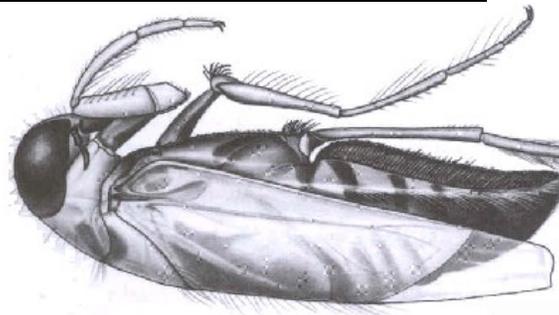
# Backswimmer

Order: Hemiptera Family: Notonectidae



Size: 5-16 mm (adult)

Number of species in North America: 32



ADULT

Hind pair of legs are oarlike with swimming hairs

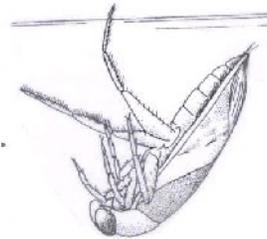
Usually red eyes, well-developed and prominent

Narrow segmented beak

Long front legs with two short claws

Oval-shaped body, dark colored stomach, light colored back, sometimes with patterns

The backswimmer, like the diving beetle, uses its hind legs as oars but because it is buoyant and its legs move relatively slowly, it travels along a series of arcs, moving forward and downward on the power stroke and floating upward during the recovery stroke.



Credits:

McCafferty, W. Patrick. *Aquatic Entomology*, 1981.

Reid, K. George. *A Golden Guide to Pond Life*, 1995.

Voshell, J. Reese Jr. *A Guide to Common Freshwater Invertebrates of North America*, 2002.

## SIMILAR TO: Water Boatman

- Backswimmer swims on back; the Water Boatman swims upright.
- Backswimmer has long front legs; the Water Boatman has short front legs.
- Backswimmer has narrow segmented beak (mouth); the Water boatman beak is blunt and non-segmented.

**Diet:** Body fluids of insects, crustaceans, snails, fish, tadpoles.

**Food for:** Predaceous fish.

**Habitat:** Bodies of still water, slower parts of streams and rivers (usually benthic).

**Movement:** Swims on back. Will rest on plants or on bottom.

**Breathing:** Swims to surface for air. Thin film of air kept on underside of body by thin hairs. Oxygen is then taken up through openings called spiracles. Oxygen can also be stored under the wings.

**Water Quality Indicator:** Group III- can exist under a wide range of water quality conditions including polluted waters.

## Life Cycle Corner

### Incomplete Metamorphosis

In Spring, cigar shaped eggs are glued to or inserted inside the stems of water plants in a still water environment. The young hatch in one or two weeks and have red eyes and a white body.

