

# Spiny and Fishhook Waterflea WATCH

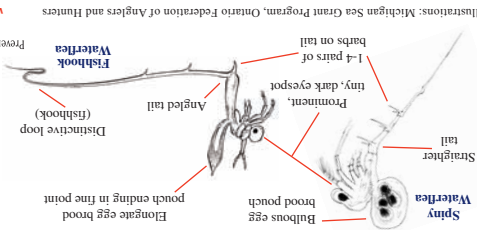
Project of the Great Lakes  
Sea Grant Network and  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## Anatomy of Two Invaders



Prevent transport of aquatic invasive species.  
Clean all recreational equipment.  
[www.ProtectOurWaters.net](http://www.ProtectOurWaters.net)

**STOP AQUATIC  
HITCHHIKERS!**



Illustrations: Michigan Sea Grant Program, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters

## General Characteristics

- Difficult to distinguish without magnification, 1/4 - 5/8 in (5-15mm) total length
- Clumps look and feel like gelatin or cotton bating with tiny black spots
- Prefer deep lakes, but can establish in shallow waterbodies and rivers
- Abundant during summer (June-September) depending upon water temperatures

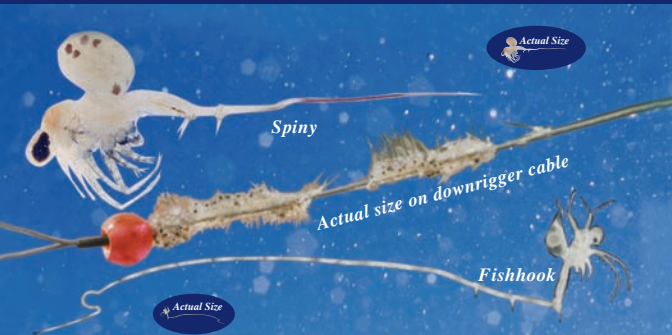


Photo credits: Bill O'Neill, Jeff Gunderson, Igor Grigorovich

## *Spiny and Fishhook Waterfleas*

Spiny (*Bythotrephes longimanus*) and fishhook (*Cercopagis pengoi*) waterfleas are small predacious crustaceans that threaten aquatic ecosystems and fishing by competing with native fish for food and fouling gear. Both arrived in ships' ballast water from Eurasia. Spiny waterfleas were discovered in Lake Ontario in 1982, then spread to all of the Great Lakes, and some inland lakes including Lake Champlain. Fishhook waterfleas were first discovered in Lake Ontario in 1998, then spread to parts of lakes Michigan, Erie, and the Finger Lakes of New York.

Anglers often discover new infestations. Both waterfleas collect in masses on fishing lines and downrigger cables (see cover). These masses can clog the first eyelet of rods, damage a reel's drag system, and prevent fish from being landed. They can spread to inland waters when fishing gear is contaminated with egg-laden females. While females die out of water, under certain conditions they produce eggs that resist drying, remain viable, and can establish a new population. Eradicating established infestations is impossible. Your help detecting and reporting new infestations is vital for preventing their spread.

### *What you can do*

- **Learn** to recognize these waterfleas on fishing gear (see front cover).
- **Inspect** and **remove** aquatic plants, mud and animals, including gelatinous or cotton batting-like material from lines, especially where they meet a swivel, lure or downrigger ball connection (plucking like a guitar string helps).
- **Drain** lake or river water from bilge, livewell, and motor before leaving access.
- **Dispose** of unwanted live bait, worms, and fish parts in the trash.
- **Rinse** boat & equipment with high pressure, hot water, **AND/OR**
- **Dry** everything for five days or more before reuse.
- **Report** new sightings – note exact location; place specimens in a sealed container with rubbing (isopropyl) alcohol; and call the WI Sea Grant Program in Manitowoc, (920) 683-4697; the WI DNR in Madison, (608) 266-6437; or a local DNR office; or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ashland, (715) 682-6185.

### **REMINDER:** *Know the rules!*

Specimens are needed to confirm sightings, but some jurisdictions prohibit possession and transport of invasive aquatic plants and animals. Contact your local natural resource management agency for instructions. Unauthorized introduction of plants, fish, or invertebrates into the wild is illegal. Protect your property and our waters.