

WATER MITES

Trombidiformes: Aturidae
Kongsbergia sp.

Bug of the Month



The critters photographed above are an understated group of macroinvertebrates called water mites. These mites are not frequently encountered, and are an aquatic arachnid belonging to the family Aturidae: genus *Kongsbergia*. Mites in this genus are known as the “butt mites” due to their appearance, but the origin of this nickname is unclear. Water mites are some of the most diverse but understudied aquatic invertebrate taxa in the world, containing upward of 6,000 identified species. In most aquatic

studies, water mites are usually ignored or simply identified as Hydracarina or Hydrachnidia, which are arbitrary groupings of different water mite taxa; this general classification further obscures mite representation.

Water mites live in most aquatic habitats, but the water mites pictured are from the substrate in a fast-flowing riffle habitat. Water mites are small in size (~1-3 mm) and resemble a small pebble with legs to the untrained eye. Juvenile water

mites could also be considered to be the aquatic version of a terrestrial tick, but don't despair, they prefer to parasitize other macroinvertebrates, not humans.

To our best knowledge, Penn State maintains the largest collection of water mites in Pennsylvania, and among the largest in the country. They can be found along with many other invertebrate collections at the Frost Entomological Museum!

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