

Focus on Aquatic Macroinvertebrates

What in the world is a macroinvertebrate?

Have you ever seen a clam or mussel lying in the river? Then you spotted a macroinvertebrate and probably didn't even know it.

Invertebrates are organisms which lack an internal skeleton of cartilage or bone. **Macro** means large enough to be seen with the naked eye. Examples of macroinvertebrates include the larvae of mayflies, stoneflies, and dragonflies, as well as creatures such as leeches, crayfish, and snails. Many of these organisms spend all or part of their life cycle in water. Unless you are really looking for these creatures, you may never notice that they are right under your toes. Aquatic macroinvertebrates live in the small spaces between gravel in our Ozark streams.



Aquatic organisms live in the spaces between gravel.

Why are macroinvertebrates important?

Food Source

Fish, reptiles, amphibians, and birds all depend on macroinvertebrates. A crash in the invertebrate population would soon be followed by a crash in these other species.

Recycling Organic Material

Macroinvertebrates break down plant materials and make the nutrients available for hundreds of other organisms.

Water Quality Assessment

Some kinds of macroinvertebrates are sensitive to poor water quality, while others are very tolerant of poor water quality conditions. A rise in the population of a tolerant species could indicate a drop in water quality. For example, rat-tailed maggots are very tolerant of low water quality and can be found even in highly polluted waters.

