Who Are The Waterbugs?

Sorting out who's who beneath the surface

CREEPY, CRAWLY, COMPLETELY AMAZING!

Waterbugs come in all shapes and sizes. Scientists call them 'macroinvertebrates', and sort them into groups based on how they look and how they've evolved.

MEET THE FIVE MAIN KINDS OF FRESHWATER BUGS THAT KEEP OUR WATERWAYS HEALTHY

INSECTS

The busiest bugs in the creek. With six legs and three body parts, insects rule the water. Dragonflies, beetles and mosquitoes start as eggs, then grow through larval or nymph stages before growing wings as adults.

Fun fact: Some dragonfly nymphs can shoot water out of their bottoms to zoom away from danger. Jet power!

Common Finds:

Dragonfly nymph
Caddisfly larva
Mayfly nymph
Diving beetle

WORMS

Long, soft and wiggly. Worms don't have legs, but they're pros at munching dead leaves and plants. They turn waste into nutrients for everything else. Not glamorous, but very important.

Did you know? Some aquatic worms wiggle around to help oxygen reach their skin. Talk about multitasking.

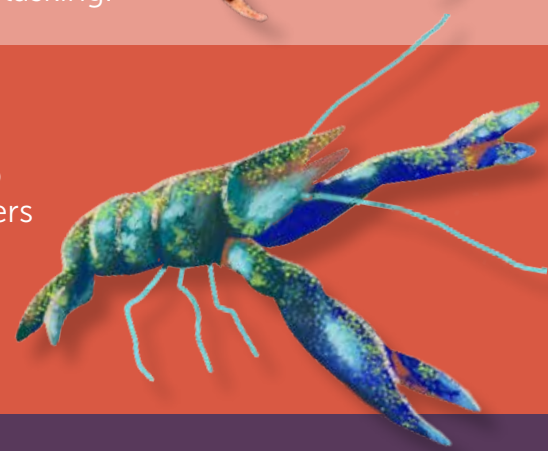
Common Finds:

Segmented worm
Flatworm
Leech
Nematode

CRUSTACEANS

The tank crew of the waterway. They wear armour and have lots of legs. Yabbies, shrimp and water slaters are the cleaners and recyclers of the creek. Always busy. Always hungry.

Fun fact: Yabbies can wave their claws to warn off rivals or say "this log's taken."



Common Finds:

Common yabby
Freshwater shrimp
Water slater
Freshwater prawn

MOLLUSCS

Soft on the inside, tough on the outside. Snails and mussels wear hard shells for protection. They slide slowly along rocks and plants, cleaning up algae as they go. No rush when you're this efficient.

Did you know? Snails use a rough tongue called a radula to scrape food off rocks. Tiny tongue, big job.

Common Finds:

Freshwater snail
Freshwater limpet
Freshwater mussel
Freshwater clam

ARACHNIDS

Eight legs. Big attitude. Water spiders and mites crawl, paddle or even trap tiny prey. Some breathe using a bubble of air under their body, like a mini scuba tank. Clever and a little creepy.

Fun fact: Fishing spiders dive underwater by trapping air bubbles on their bodies to breathe. Like a spidy snorkel suit.

Common Finds:

Water mite
Fishing spider
Raft spider
Long-jawed spider

BUILT FOR THEIR HABITAT

Adaptations are special features that help an organism survive where it lives. For waterbugs, these include how they **breathe**, **feed**, and **move**.

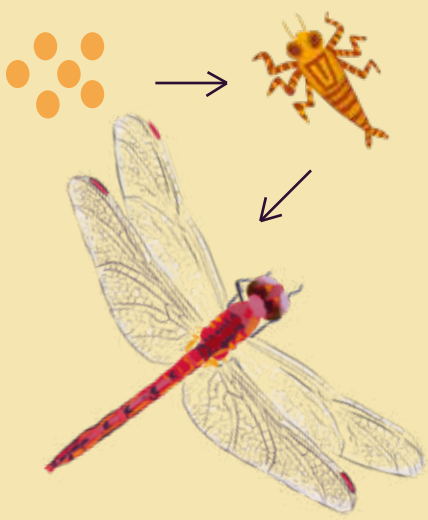
Some breathe through gills, air bubbles or even their skin. Some have strong jaws for hunting, nets or filters for catching food, or scrapers for grazing on algae.

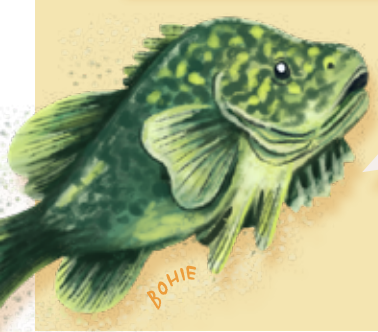
Others have swimming legs, hooks for gripping rocks, or flat bodies for life in fast-flowing water.

METAMORPHOSIS: THE INSECT LIFECYCLE

Many freshwater insects start life underwater as eggs, growing through larval or nymph stages before becoming flying adults.

This change, called metamorphosis, connects life below the surface with life above it.





Every kind of waterbug has its own superpower

Some are fierce hunters, others are peaceful grazers. Together they keep the water clean and the food web ticking along.

Next time you visit a creek, look under rocks, sticks and leaf litter. There are whole bug cities waiting to be discovered!

Join a Waterwatch waterbug survey! Every bug you find helps tell the story of waterway health.

Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch is supported by the ACT Government

To learn more about our wonderful waterways visit www.act.waterwatch.org.au

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