Midwest Invasive Species Information Network

# Fishhook waterflea

## *Cercopagis pengoi*

### Description

Reported in Lake Ontario in 1998, likely introduced in ballast water; spread to Lakes Michigan and Erie.

### Identification

1/4 - 5/8 inch; long tail spine ending in a "hook"; prominent dark eyespot; can form clumps (with black spots) that look and feel like gelatin or wet cotton.

### Habitat

Native to northern Europe. Prefer brackish to freshwater; deep lakes and shallow water bodies.

### Reproduction

Cyclic parthenogen. It reproduces parthenogenically during the summer and gametogenically later in the year. The parthenogenically-produced young develop in a fluid-filled dorsal brood pouch that ruptures to release the young. In late summer and autumn, parthenogenic females produce eggs that

*Source: MISIN. 2024. Midwest Invasive Species Information Network. Michigan State University - Applied Spatial Ecology and Technical Services Laboratory. Available online at https://www.misin.msu.edu/facts/detail.php?id=232.*

develop into males and gametogenic females, which copulate. Gametogenic reproduction results in resting eggs, which are released when the brood pouch ruptures and overwinter in sediment. Sexual females are reproductive only at instars II and II, producing 1-4 eggs, while parthenogenic females produce 1-24 embryos.

**Impact**

The fishhook waterflea's "hook" catches on fishing lines and nets, fouling gear and lowering the quality of recreational fishing and charter trips. They can jam the first eyelet of fishing rods, often resulting in the loss of a hooked fish. They also devour plankton, the essential diet of larval native fish. They can also coat commercial fishing nets.

**Similar**

Spiny waterflea (Bythotrephes longimanus).

**Monitoring and Rapid Response**

Spread by angling and boating equipment; eggs can be transported between lakes in early spring in sediment stuck to anchors and downrigger cables. Bait and bait water should not be transported to other waterbodies. Remove gelatinous blobs or cotton-like material from gear and examin lines at swivel, lure and downrigger connections as well as nets and anchor ropes. Rinsing boat and equipment with hot water (>40 degrees celsius), high pressure spray or drying boat and equipment for at least 5 days before re-entering water.

**Credits**

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