

SNOW FLEAS - SPRING SUNBATHERS

Anyone walking through a woods or over an open field during the last three weeks will probably have noticed the abundance of snow fleas, especially on a south facing slope during sunny days. Snow fleas belong to the order of insects called collembola (commonly known as springtails). They are soft primitive wingless insects with chewing mouth parts. They appear to the naked eye as a jumping grayish dot but in actuality have a head with two short antennae and compound eyes (eight eyes on each side of head!). The body composed of six distinct parts (somites) is long and slender.

The most noticeable method of movement is accomplished by means of a springing mechanism composed of a spring (furcula) on the fifth abdominal somite and a clasp (hamula) on the third abdominal somite; used to hold the spring until it is released suddenly.

Little is known of their general life history. The snow flea is most commonly noticed on the surface of the snow during spring especially on days when temperatures are unseasonably warm. They tend to congregate in any indentation or imprint in the snow. For instance, you may notice a few on the snow when you begin your hike in early afternoon. However if you retrace your steps, you may find some if your foot prints have almost turned black. They also tend to concentrate around the edge of the tree canopy instead of the base.

Young snow fleas look similar to adults. Their food is probably mostly plant material. They have no true breathing organs, and accomplish breathing through the surface of their bodies. This may explain their sensitiveness to varying climatic conditions and their obvious environmental preference so far as amount of sunlight is concerned.

These insects, as far as is known, are of little economic importance. Sometimes they occur in large numbers on the snow and become a nuisance in maple sugar camps where possibly they do a small amount of damage. On P.E.I. these hardy little creatures which start sun bathing unseasonably early by human standards can do little more than inspire awe in us.

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LOBSTERS - FOOD FOR PAUPERS?

Leaming Murphy from the Department of Fisheries, spoke at our March meeting on fisheries of P.E.I., past and present. The members were particularly interested in the history of the lobster and I thought I would highlight some of the details Leaming covered in his talk. Lobsters were not always so sparse or so sought after. In the 1860's lobsters were very plentiful and were easily caught with dip nets, poles or simply by picking from the rocks. Around 1870, the supply of lobsters seemed inexhaustible. A canner writing in 1873 of the supply of lobsters for his factory stated "The heavy gale of last August drove more lobsters ashore within five miles of my packing house than I could make use of during the whole summer. They formed a row from one to five feet deep, and I should estimate them at an average of 1,000 lobsters to every two rods of shore." Another writer, commenting on the abundance of lobsters in those early days, remarks: "In spite of their increased commercial value, it is nevertheless a fact that in some of the northern parts of the Gulf of St. Lawrence good marketable lobsters are used to manure the fields."

By 1873, the total value of the fishery was \$218,000. Ten years later, this had increased to nearly two million dollars, while the number of lobster canneries had increased from two to two hundred. The lobster pack went up from 6,711 pounds in 1870 to nearly five million pounds in 1882. Every little cove had its factory. By the turn of the