

# Kenk's amphipod

## *Stygobromus kenki*

In the hustle and bustle of our nation's capital, it can be difficult to find places that offer a haven for nature. Thanks to the foresight of planners, special places like Rock Creek Park in the District of Columbia have been set aside from development. This site in the Rock Creek valley offers protection for native plants and animals and living in this protected place is the extremely rare Kenk's amphipod.

### Amphi-what?

An amphipod is a small shrimp-like freshwater crustacean. It does not have a hard outer shell like its cousins, the lobster and true shrimp. The order name Amphipoda means "different feet" in Latin, referring to the many types of legs these crustaceans have, including some for eating and some for swimming.

Kenk's amphipod was first discovered by Dr. Roman Kenk in 1967. Found in dead leaves and fine soils in the waters of spring-seep outflows (where underground water comes to the surface), the species is currently known only from five spring-seep sites in Washington, D.C. and Montgomery County, Maryland. Three of the Rock Creek sites are in Rock Creek Park, which is managed by the National Park Service, and one of the Montgomery County sites is also in a park. This tiny amphipod may grow to be one quarter of an inch in length; because it lives primarily underground, it is without color and has no eyes.

Biologists believe that Kenk's amphipod may eat bacteria and fungi found on dead and decaying leaves, but much of the life history of the species remains a mystery. Its underground habitat makes it very difficult to study, and its presence on the surface is rare and unpredictable.

### Amphipod in peril

It is remarkable that Kenk's amphipod has survived in such a heavily developed area, and most likely not a coincidence that four of the five sites where it is found are within park borders. This limited distribution at these few sites leaves the population of Kenk's amphipod extremely vulnerable. The main threats to this tiny animal are changes in water quality and quantity. Water quality changes could come from toxic spills, sewer leaks, and the accumulation of pollutants from development in the watershed. Changes in the amount or level of water flowing could come from land disturbance or climate change, which could also alter the amount of precipitation in the Washington, D.C. area.

The occurrence of Kenk's amphipod indicates good water quality. Many organizations are working together to learn more about Kenk's amphipod to ensure that its habitat and our groundwater are protected.

### How you can help

- Dispose of trash properly.
- Do not dump trash, oil or other products into storm water drains.
- Consider alternative methods for maintaining your lawn without the use of herbicides and pesticides.
- Report illegal dumping to authorities.
- Remember, what we put down our drains ends up in everyone's water supply.



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For more information, contact:  
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