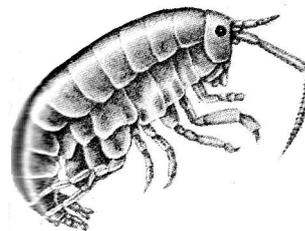


The invasion of the Sand Hoppers

At least I think that's what they were! And there were a great number of them, in a variety of different sizes. .

The location was the WI meeting in the Dale Coronation Hall on Tuesday 16th October. The meeting began at 7:30 which happened to be about the same time as a very high tide. As we went into the hall we noticed quite a few sand hoppers on the wall and also on the road and footpath, and we assumed that they had been displaced from the beach by the high tide.



After the meeting, we realised that the sand hoppers were covering the ground outside the hall and many had managed to get into the hall. Every time the door was opened more came in and their rather unpredictable little jumping movements proved quite unnerving to some WI members present! It was by now well after high tide but the little hoppers did not seem interested in getting back to the beach – they were more interested in a dry light warm place like the hall. Now this seems odd as they are creatures of dark damp places – their normal home is several centimetres down in the sand on the beach where they stay cool and moist during the day, migrating down the beach at night to feed on rotting seaweed. The end of this story is not known but I fear that most of the sand hoppers would have come to a dehydrated end – they need to stay moist at all times just like woodlice to which they are fairly closely related.

I understand that much the same sequence of events happened at the Youth Club on the following Friday – but by now the high tides had abated. So was this some kind of lemming-like mass walkabout? Perhaps somebody from the Fort can enlighten me?

On reading up about sand hoppers in order to write this article I found out a couple of interesting things – firstly, they are quite long lived. Females live till about 18 months and males to 21 months - they have quite a long development period and do not breed in their first year. And secondly, young sand hoppers cannot dig down into the sand so they spend their time in nice damp seaweed, thus providing a very welcome source of food for all kinds of birds in late summer.