

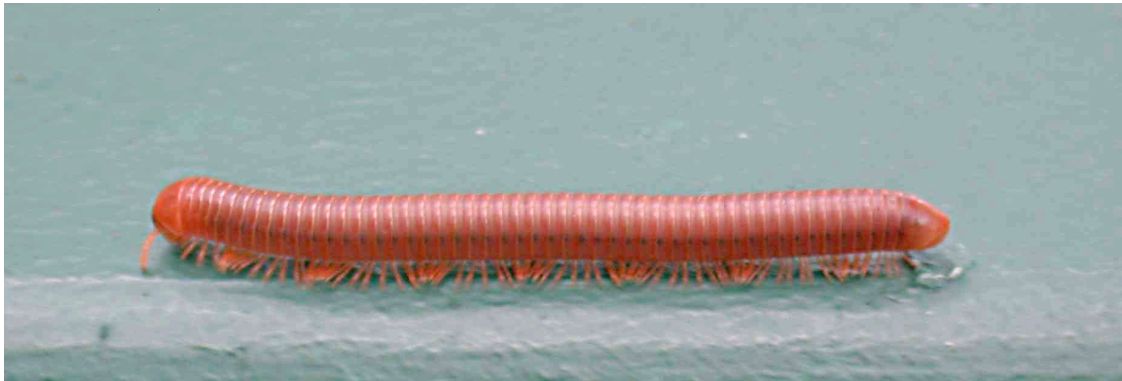
**“Worms” on Your Sidewalk?
Millipedes Disperse in Large Numbers in October**
Doug Caldwell



The phone calls and emails usually start 2-3 weeks after rainy season stops. This year, I've had more than before: "What are all these 1 to 4 inch crunchy "worms" on our lanai and side walls? I don't like them!"

Its like clock-work, yet the three millipede experts I contacted (that's all there are, 3! at least in the U.S.) do not understand what triggers the mass movement of so many multi-footed arthropods. Millipedes (abbreviated "millies") are not insects nor worms. They are in a distinct taxonomic group, distinguished by the unique characteristic (among other less observable features) of having 4 legs, not 2 legs like centipedes, per body segment. Now that is a coordination miracle!

There are at least 915 species of millipedes in the U.S. and Canada. The native species are content living out, for the most part, pretty solitary lives and to chew moldy leaves and help digest the duff of forest litter. This is an important step in the needed process of recycling large pieces of organic matter into smaller particles to improve the soil texture and better nourish other life forms. Thus, these are labeled beneficial arthropods. They can inhabit your mulched plant beds, vegetable gardens, turf thatch, compost piles- anywhere there is decaying plant material.



However, they can become a nuisance when they occur in large numbers in public places, such as shops or schools and leave a lot of frass behind- great for the garden though! The millies secrete some nasty protective chemicals which is why the anoles and birds don't pounce on them. Large numbers of their dead carcasses can be smelly- so don't collect too many of them in an indoor vacuum cleaner.

There are two foreign species (the yellow-banded millipede (*Anadenobolus monilicornus*) and the rusty millipede (*Trigoniulus corallinus*)) which cause all the uproar due to their many membered migrations and habits of congregating on sidewalks and building surfaces in large numbers AND coming inside to visit with us. The yellow-banded arrived in 2001 and the rusty millie around 2005. None of the scientists I contacted understand why the millies collect on seemingly inappropriate hardscapes. It's



the millipede version of the mythical lemmings' death leap into the sea—if one goes, all go—like sheep they have been lead astray? Its most likely a population dispersal induced by the drying environment caused by the abrupt lack of rain signaling dry season.

Millipedes, like insects, breath and expire through holes along the side of their bodies called spiracles. However, unlike insects which can close their spiracles,

millipedes' spiracles are stuck open—with no options to close down and prevent desiccation and hence their subsequent demise in an arid environment.



As far as management, check sliders and door to be certain they are sealed best as possible. It is uncertain if they are attracted to lights, but it is better to turn night lights off to minimize other pest problems too. Some have installed barriers to restrict their movement. Pesticides can be found labeled for millipede control, they usually contain pyrethroids. Read the label carefully to see if it is registered for spraying building surfaces and follow mixing guidelines carefully. The affects of sprays will only last about 5 to 10 days, so applications may need to be repeated. Better yet, just put up with our little organic matter pulverizers, they will move out in a few months, maybe..... For more information see:

<http://trec.ifas.ufl.edu/mannion/pdfs/Yellow-bandedMillipede.pdf>

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