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Freshwater Jellyfish in New Hampshire – They Do Exist!

Have you ever seen a freshwater jellyfish? Are you aware they exist? Very few of us have been lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the freshwater jellyfish. They are infrequently found in lakes and ponds throughout New Hampshire.

What are freshwater jellyfish?

Craspedacusta sowerbii (freshwater jellyfish) was noted for the first time in England in 1880. It was first discovered in the United States in 1908 and has been reported in many of the contiguous 48 states. Typically, this creature appears in small ponds, however, there are conflicting reports stating in what types of waterbodies they are most commonly discovered. Some literature says they are found in old quarries, while other literature indicates that they thrive in new reservoirs. Wherever they are found, many scientists agree they are elusive.

In its polyp form, the jellyfish is less than 2-millimeters long. It is often unnoticed by the naked eye, mostly because it resides in the mucky bottom of a pond. As the polyp creeps along the substrate, it eats tiny invertebrates like zooplankton. The polyps can reproduce by asexual reproduction. Small buds are produced and, before too long, the adult jellyfish are found floating freely in the water. The freshwater jellyfish can also reproduce sexually, although the populations are rarely of mixed sexes. For the most part, all male or all female congregations have been observed. Sexual reproduction has been reported through controlled scientific experiments within a laboratory environment.



A colony of three polyps.



Three medusae.

The freshwater jellyfish medusa is about the size of a quarter. It is translucent, but may appear white or green. Its sex organs, which hang from the center of the bell, make the jellyfish more visible. The tentacles around the bell are used to capture prey. Due to their small size, they are not harmful to humans; only small fish and invertebrates are susceptible to their stings. In this stage, the creature may be visible for only a few months in the summer time, usually from July to October. It seems they prefer the warmer waters that late summer has to offer. Don't count on seeing them in the same

pond two years in a row; they may appear again in a few years or not at all! This is one aspect that has made researching the freshwater jellyfish so difficult.

Where have freshwater jellyfish been found in New Hampshire?

Below is a list of waterbodies where sightings have occurred and were reported to NHDES since the late 1970's:

Angle Pond, Hampstead/Sandown	Merrymeeting Lake, New Durham
Armington, Piermont	Mirror Lake, Tuftonboro
Baboosic Lake, Amherst/Merrimack	Naticook Lake, Merrimack
Bear Pond, Alton	New Pond, Canterbury
Big Island Pond, Derry/Hampstead	Newfound Lake, Bristol
Captains Pond, Salem	Onway Lake, Raymond
Clement Pond, Hopkinton	Oyster River, Durham
Country Pond, Kingston/Newton	Province Lake, Effingham
Crescent Lake, Acworth	Purity Lake, Madison
Crystal Lake, Manchester	Russell Pond, Sutton
French Pond, Henniker	Sandy Pond, Wakefield
Frost Pond, Jaffrey	Shaw Pond, New Durham
Gilmore Pond, Jaffrey	Silver Lake, Belmont
Goose Pond, Canaan	Squam Lake - Squaw Cove, Sandwich
Harrisville Pond, Harrisville	Stone Pond, Marlboro
Harvey Lake, Northwood	Sunset Lake, Peterborough
Indian Pond, Orford	Sunset Lake, Greenfield
Knights Pond, Alton	Sunset Lake (a.k.a. Wash Pond), Hampstead
Knowles Pond, Northfield	Swain's Lake, Barrington
Lake Ivanhoe, East Wakefield	Thorndike Pond, Jaffrey
Lake Jo-Sylvia, Contoocook	Turkey Pond, Concord
Lake Massabesic, Auburn/Manchester	Turtle Town Pond, Concord
Lake Massasecum, Bradford	Wason Pond, Chester
Lake Warren, Alstead	Wheelright Pond, Lee
Loch-Lydon Reservoir, Sutton	White Oak Pond, Holderness
Lowd Pond, Madison	Whittemore Pond, Bennington
Lower Dan Hole Pond, Ossipee	

The biology students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, under the supervision of Dr. Terry Peard, are conducting research on freshwater jellyfish. To find more information about these mysterious creatures, check out their website at: <http://freshwaterjellyfish.org/history.html>. They have many pages of information and links to other researchers around the globe. The photos used in this document are courtesy of their research.

If you observe one of these creatures in your lake or pond, please let us know. We are always looking to extend our list of waterbodies with known populations of jellyfish. Please email the information about your sighting, and include the lake/pond name, town, date, plus any other pertinent information to: beaches@des.nh.gov, or call (603) 271-0698.