



## What is Lurking in Your Favorite Lake?



Do these swimmers know what may be lurking below?

When one thinks about the living organisms that inhabit a typical New Hampshire lake, most will conjure up thoughts about the big fish that got away, those cute little painted turtles basking on a rock in the sun, or the assortment of worthless, biting, bloodsucking insects.

But did you know that lakes are also home to such exotic sounding things as jellyfish, sponges, eels, water fleas, water scorpions, horsehair worms, water bears, carnivorous plants and basketball-sized jelly masses called Bryozoans? Don't worry, no one has ever been attacked or consumed by these relatively unknown lake residents! Probably, the most interesting of the list are the sponges, jellyfish and Bryozoans.

Freshwater sponges are usually pencil-shaped green structures attached to underwater brush or logs. They can also be shapeless green "spongy" masses covering rocks. Their green coloration usually comes from the encapsulated algae cells. Filtering organic matter from the water is their method of feeding. If you pick one up you will notice a pungent swamp odor.



A freshwater sponge.

Transparent jellyfish range in size from about the size of a dime to a quarter and are rarely seen even by a seasoned aquatic biologist. When they do show up, many thousands can be found. In most cases, they exist in the polyp stage on the bottom of the lake, out of our sight. They are harmless and quite a treat to see in great numbers.



Freshwater jellyfish

Bryozoans are gelatinous colonies made up of minute individual animals called “zooids.” The entire colony can be found usually attached to logs, brush, or overhanging tree limbs submerged in the water. At first glance, most people are hesitant to ever get near the “alien” looking mass of brownish jelly. Most of these colonies are the sizes of grapefruits, while some can get much larger.



Bryozoan

So, what are all these critters good for, you ask? They, like hundreds of other unnoticed water organisms contribute to the success of a balanced and diverse ecosystem.

If you find something weird or fascinating in the lake, contact us and we'll help you figure out what it is!

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For information, visit [www.nhlakes.org](http://www.nhlakes.org), email [info@nhlakes.org](mailto:info@nhlakes.org), or call 603.226.0299.

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