

MYSTERY INSECT IDENTIFIED

By Lyn Chimera

In late October an insect sample was sent to the Hotline office. It was 2 of the same insect a woman found in her basement. They were black, cream striped and extremely fuzzy. Under the microscope the fuzziness was amazing!

I couldn't figure it out and left it for the MG volunteer the next day. She didn't know and neither did Sharon so the sample was sent to Cornell. The mystery insect was a hairy rove beetle (*Creophilus maxillosus*).

Rove beetles belong to the family Staphylinidae, the largest family of beetles in North America with about 4360 species identified so far! The hairy rove beetle is among the largest at between 12 and 23 mm. It's the most distinctive rove beetle due to its hair-like setae (formed from a single epidermal cell) covering the elytra (modified, hardened fore-wing of certain beetles) and the abdomen.

Rove beetles are scavengers of carrion, carrion maggots and fly larvae. They are beneficial insects as they are predators of pest fly larva. They are also helpful in forensic entomology (think CSI). When disturbed they curl up or raise their tail like a scorpion. They secrete a chemical substance that is irritating deterring predators.

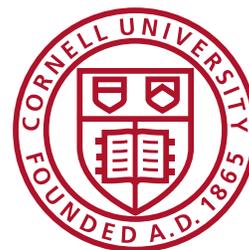
Female hairy rove beetles are very prolific laying up to 8 eggs/day and 500 throughout their lifetime. The offspring from 1 female can number 422,000 in only 3 generations!

Hairy rove beetles are harmless to people but they can enter homes accidentally which is what happened to the woman who sent in the samples. Hairy rove beetles are found across the northern hemisphere around the world. Their range includes all of North America.

This is what I love about the Hotline!

Info for this article was adapted from a paper written by Nicholas Johnson, Philip Stanley and Andrea Lucky published by the Entomology & Nematology Department of the University of Florida.

[Here is some more information on hairy rove beetles](#), or read more at the [Year of Nature Blog](#). ■



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