

Fairy shrimps on Gabriola (based on observations by Jethro Baker)



Shrimps are usually thought of as being in the marine domain, but Gabriola Streamkeeper Jethro has found some here on the island that live in freshwater ponds and ditches. Quite remarkably, these particular shrimps¹ specialize in making use of watery environments that completely dry up in the summer.

They're called "fairy shrimps" and the species Jethro found is *Eubranchipus oregonus*, or Oregon fairy shrimp, so called because they were first described in, where else, Oregon in 1830. The one on the left is an immature female. Since then they have been previously found on Vancouver Island, other Canadian Gulf Islands (Saltspring, Texada, and

Galiano), and the San Juan Islands (Lopez). They have become very rare on mainland BC because of loss of habitat.

All species of fairy shrimp can withstand long periods of desiccation and can remain as encased embryos called cysts, totally dehydrated and inactive for many years, and in some cases decades, in dried-up mud. Some live in ephemeral puddles in southern deserts; others where melting snow creates ponds and lakes every spring.

Nobody knows what they taste like, even Jethro, but perhaps not too bad, and at least you wouldn't have to peel them (no carapace), and, for an easy-to-guess reason, fairy shrimps are almost never found in water where there are fish and ducks. ◇

¹ There are other kinds of freshwater shrimp around on Gabriola that aren't fairy shrimps; one unidentified species has been reported in the Commons Pond, which is in the Hoggan Lake catchment area.