

Centipedes and Millipedes

Cloudbridge Nature Reserve - Nature Notes No. 23

Centipedes and millipedes are myriapods, meaning 'many pairs of legs'. They are not insects as they have more than six legs, but the names centipede (meaning 100 legs) and millipede (meaning 1,000 legs) are a bit misleading. The number of pairs of legs in centipedes is always an odd number (so they cannot have 100 legs), and the most a millipede is known to have is 750 legs.

What do these creatures have in common? All centipedes and millipedes:

- have a segmented body
- have one pair of antennae
- have breathing holes called spiracles.

How can you tell a centipede from a millipede?

- Centipedes have one pair of legs per segment; millipedes have two per segment.
- Centipedes have the first pair of legs behind the head modified into a pair of fangs containing a poison gland. They can give a painful bite.
- Centipedes are carnivores, feeding on insects; millipedes are herbivores or detritivores (feed on decaying vegetation).
- Many centipedes guard their eggs and young by curling around them, while millipedes protect their eggs from predators in a nest of hard soil.

Millipede or centipede?

Is the creature in the picture a centipede or a millipede?



(Hint: count the number of leg pairs per segment.)