

SPOTLIGHT

ORIENTAL COCKROACH



Female oriental cockroach (*Blatta orientalis*), also known as water bug, on the floor of a row house in Center City.

Wings of female oriental cockroaches are vestigial, incapable of flight. How have these insects, which are up to 3 cm (one inch) long, dispersed so successfully in Center City?

Storm drains in Center City connect to sewers that offer oriental cockroaches food, water, shelter, and safe passage underground. They also provide these cockroaches subterranean access into buildings. Crevices in masonry walls in nineteenth century buildings offer cockroaches crawl spaces into row houses and apartments.

Nocturnal activity and black profiles help keep oriental cockroaches hidden. Outdoors, nocturnal travel protects them from solar radiation and desiccation. Female oriental cockroaches that disperse into territory without males can reproduce asexually.

The oriental cockroach has had a long time to adapt to human habitation. In Britain, archeological excavation turned up remains of this species in a Roman town from the fourth century. The species originated in Africa, despite its name.¹