WOODLICE (Order Isopoda)

These are grey/brown animals and have a characteristic shielded appearance which look like tiny armadillos.

Woodlice are the only crustaceans which have adapted to living exclusively on land. Other crustaceans include lobsters, crabs and prawns. They breath by means of gills which are situated on their legs and they can only survive in areas of high humidity.

There are 37 species of woodlice found in the British-Isles which are capable of breeding outdoors in our climate. Of these there are two species in particular that are commonly found around buildings, Oniscus asellus and Porcellio scaber.

Woodlice are harmless to man and do not bite so they are only classified as a nuisance pest. However, in areas of high humidity they can sometimes appear in large numbers. Once a Woodlouse wanders into a dry room it will quickly dry out and die as they lack the waxy outer cuticle, which in insects is responsible for preventing moisture loss.

It is very common to find the odd Woodlice or two inside the home but if you are finding them in large numbers then there is usually an underlying cause but this can sometimes be difficult to find or to rectify.

Start by looking around the outside of the property and make sure there is nothing stacked up against the walls. Piles of bricks, logs, old flags or any such materials can be a haven for hundreds of these creatures. If you have shrubs or any other type of vegetation growing up or against the walls this can also attract them.

Try to make sure the outer brickwork is in a good state of repair with no gaps or pipe holes that could allow Woodlice to enter through. If you do have a lot of plant life close to the house it could help by fitting small-mesh covers over the air-bricks to prevent access by the woodlice and other insects.
Sometimes the problem may be due to mould growing on the inside of the cavity walls which the woodlice can feed on. This is often the case when concrete, tarmac, flags or similar has been laid <u>on top</u> of the original pathway or drive, thus raising the level of the outer perimeter of the property, sometimes even to above the damp course.

Another common attractant for Woodlice is if the under-floor areas of a property are very damp. This can be compounded if there are any rotting pieces of timber off-cuts lying on the damp ground beneath the floorboards producing mould growth, which again the woodlice will feed on. These off-cuts can sometimes by traced back to workmen leaving them there years earlier.

In many cases if the outside perimeter of the building is cleared and the brickwork is repaired and covers fitted over the air-bricks it can be enough to solve the problem. However damp problems can be a far more difficult task to rectify but as the same as for slugs it can help by sealing all gaps beneath the skirting boards with a sealant, which is easily applied using a caulking gun.

The application of ant powder under the carpets around the edges of the affected rooms can be beneficial but any Woodlice entering a normally dry house should only survive a few hours anyway.