

In recent years, carpet beetles have become increasingly prevalent, especially in southern England where they seem to thrive in suburban conditions. They are responsible for damaging clothes and other linen.

Life Cycle

As with other beetles, the life cycle has four stages; egg, larva (commonly known as the woolly bear), pupa and beetle. The adult beetle is about 3mm long, oval in shape and the colouring is grey/brown mottled with yellowish white. They are sometimes mistaken by the householder for small ladybirds but their coat is not glossy.



They fly freely in warm weather, thus spreading the infestation in spring and early summer when adult beetles may be found outdoors feeding on light coloured flowers, or indoors where they are usually seen on walls or window ledges. The adult female, although doing no damage herself, lays her eggs on materials which will form suitable food for the resultant larvae when they hatch out. A common site is the nest of the House Sparrow or Martin, or other undisturbed places such as roof spaces or outhouses. The larvae are responsible for the damage, and when fully grown are about 6mm long and covered with brown hairs or bristles. The larva then passes into the pupa stage and after a few weeks, the life cycle (which generally takes a year or more) is completed when the beetle emerges from the pupa. The larvae are most commonly seen in the autumn and may be found crawling on walls or floors. They feed primarily on material of animal origin, e.g. woollen blankets, carpets and clothing, furs, feathers, dead birds, rodents and insects, but can also survive on vegetable foods such as wholemeal flour. In fabrics, the damage takes the form of irregular but clean holes and unlike the Clothes Moth, which usually attacks soiled articles, the Woolly Bear may damage new or clean materials, often penetrating several layers or folds.

Woolly Bear



Most damage is caused to materials which are undisturbed, such as clothing in trunks, blankets in a cupboard and wardrobes, the edges of fitted carpets or the lagging on water tanks or pipes.

Control

Control is sometimes difficult as the larvae appear fairly tolerant to some insecticides and can be widely dispersed. Cleaning is essential, and a thorough search must be made for infested materials, which should if possible be sprayed with a suitable insecticide before disposal. Valued fabrics may be dry-cleaned or vacuum cleaned on both sides. Check your roof space for any bird's nests which may be the source of the infestation. Remove any nests and proof against further entry by birds.

As the fully grown larvae are killed by temperatures in excess of 50°C, ironing linen, preferably with a steam iron, will ensure freedom from infestation prior to storage of goods.

Active infestations in roof spaces are best treated, after thorough cleaning, by the use of an insecticide. Carpets and upholstered furniture may be protected by regular brushing and vacuum cleaning.

An insecticidal dust recommended for use against carpet beetles can be brushed beneath the edges of the carpet and into crevices below the skirting's and between floorboards. These dusts can also be used in the roof space as a barrier around any holes communicating with lower rooms.

Clothes Moths

Clothes moths are another household pest and like the carpet beetle, their larvae or caterpillars can do a great deal of damage to clothes, carpets and soft furnishings. Described below are the three most common clothes moths.

The Common Clothes Moth (*Tineola bisselliella*) is a shining golden colour, between 6 -8mm long. It is common throughout the United Kingdom. Although these moths are chiefly seen in the early summer and autumn, they may be found at almost any time of year.



The Case Bearing Clothes Moth (*Tinea pellionella*) has larvae that spins a silken case in which it lives. The head and foreparts of the larvae protrude as it moves about, dragging the case with it. The adults vary in length from about 4-12mm. The fore wings are dusty brown with three blackish spots. The moths may be found from June to October and are common throughout the United Kingdom.



The Large Pale Clothes Moth (*Tinea pallescentella*) has become more common in recent years. The adults vary in size but are normally 8-12mm and have greyish brown wings with dark marks at either end. The adults may be found from June to October and are widely distributed in the United Kingdom.

Control and Treatment

Control and treatment is similar to that for carpet beetles.

Harrow Council can provide an affordable, chargeable service for the treatment of beetles and moths in domestic (including rented) and commercial properties. Please contact us for further advice.

Advice on the identification and control of all household pests is provided free of charge and is available by phone, email or via our website.

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