

Clothes moths - prevention and control

There are two main pest species in the UK.

- **The common or webbing clothes moth, *Tineola bisselliella***
- **The case-bearing clothes moth, *Tinea pellionella*.**

The webbing clothes moth is now the most common species with a very large increase in numbers in recent years.

Both species will attack and damage carpets, clothes, upholstery, textiles and animal specimens.

(See Fact sheets 4 (Webbing clothes moth) and 5 (Case-bearing clothes moth) for more information on their identification and biology).

Detection

Traps containing a pheromone lure are very effective for moths and can be used to find where they are coming from. The pheromone is specific to each species and as the lures attract only the male moths, traps will not control an infestation.

Prevention

Damage is usually in dark and hidden areas. For example, in clothing, look in crevices and creases, under collars, behind lapels, in pockets and turn-ups or where things are folded. In carpets they will be under rugs or heavy furniture or at the undisturbed edges of fitted carpets. They may also be living in wool underlay. Textiles soiled with food or urine are preferentially attacked and a stained area may be more damaged than an adjacent clean one.

Carpets

Moths love wool carpets but hate disturbance so the regular use of a vacuum cleaner will do more to prevent moths building up than anything else. Concentrate on edges of fitted carpets and move furniture to clean underneath if possible. Use the crevice tool as upright cleaners do not reach the edges of fitted carpets. Avoid folding carpets so that the wool pile is hidden against the floor. Remove pieces of carpet in wardrobes and airing cupboards. Stair carpets can be attacked under the stair rods if these are not removed and cleaned regularly.

Clothing

Moths love wool and they particularly like high quality items like cashmere. They will also eat fur, feathers and untanned skins. Keep things neatly stored in plastic bags (preferably the vacuum sealed ones) or boxes with lids. For full protection, clean items and bag them and freeze them before the summer months. (See the freezing section further down for guidance). Throw away (or recycle) any wool, fur or feathers that you do not really want to keep.

Furniture

Moths will live in upholstery material if it contains wool or horsehair. Check under seats for signs of webbing or cases. Also check around piping, in deep buttons and in seat or arm crevices. They will also live in the feather stuffing of cushions and duvets and may make holes in cotton covering material as they emerge. Feather pillows and duvets should be stored in sealed boxes or bags.

Other sources

The natural home of clothes moths is bird and animal nests. Check for blocked chimneys and flues or nests in attic eaves. Remove and destroy any nest material. Check any old lagging or insulation material; if it is wool, then remove it and replace with synthetic material. Another species of clothes moth lives in bird nests and now seems to be more common in houses. It is called the pale-backed clothes moth *Monopis crocipitella*.

Killing moths

The adult moths are relatively easy to kill, but the larvae are far more difficult. Although spray aerosols can be used to kill adults, their use alone will never solve a deep-seated pest problem. This is because the larvae will be hidden away where the pesticide will never penetrate.

Freezing

The best way of killing adults, eggs and larvae of moths in clothing and small textiles is to place items in the deep freeze. They must be placed in plastic bags and exposed to -18°C for at least two weeks to be certain of killing everything. After treatment, do not remove items from the bag for at least 24 hours to prevent condensation problems.

Larger items, such as rugs, carpets and upholstery, can be treated in a commercial freezer or by a controlled heat process.

Sprays

Many insecticide sprays and dusts will kill larvae, but only if they come into contact with them. Thorough treatment of carpet edges and infested areas under furniture with a residual insecticide such as permethrin can be effective, although repeated treatment may be necessary to catch any survivors. A desiccant dust can be used in floorboard or skirting board gaps and other dead spaces.

Repellents

Although paradichlorobenzene and naphthalene will repel and kill adult moths, many of the old moth ball formulations are now banned or not recommended. There are safer alternatives for repelling adult moths, including lavender, in dried and sachet forms, and cedar balls. These have a limited life of 3 months at the most and must be replaced regularly. They work best in enclosed spaces but they will not have any effect on larvae inside clothes or in carpets. There are also moth

killer sachets containing a pyrethroid insecticide called transfluthrin. These will kill adult moths and are effective in enclosed spaces.

Always read pesticide labels and use according to the instructions.

Moth control will not be achieved rapidly.

Good housekeeping, safe storage and regular checking of vulnerable items are essential for success.