



Information

Bohart Museum of Entomology

No. 021

Clothes Moths

The Clothes Moth, *Tineola bisellieta*, is a small insect that is a pest in many homes because of its propensity to eat natural fibers such as wool. It is second only to the carpet beetle in the amount of damage it causes in homes in California. It is much more of a pest east of the Rocky Mountains, where it is responsible for most of the damage to fabrics in homes. The natural food of Clothes Moths is pollen, hair, feathers, wool, fur, dead insects and dried animal remains. The term "moth-eaten" refers to the damage done to fabrics, skins or furs by these insects. They have probably been pests since humans started wearing clothes.

Adult Clothes Moths are small (1/4 inch from wing tip to wing tip), yellowish white or buff-colored moths, with a satiny sheen to the wings. They are weak fliers, preferring to fly in darkness. They are not attracted to lights and spend most of their life hidden in dark areas, usually among clothing and furs, or hidden in rugs and furniture.

Females lay an average of 40 to 50 eggs over a period of 2 to 3 weeks and die once egg-laying has been completed. Eggs are laid directly on the food source. Larvae are shiny white with a dark head

capsule. They spin webbing as they feed. At room temperature (68°-72° F), adult moths live 2-4 weeks, longer at lower temperatures. The complete life cycle from egg to adult takes 4 to 6 months.

The larva is the feeding stage of the moth, and thus is responsible for all of the damage to clothes and other fibers. Adults do not feed. Larvae feed on any protein-based fibers, including wool, silk, hair or fur. They also will feed on feathers and pollen. They are more likely to feed on soiled materials. The best control is to keep woolens clean, and stored with moth crystals in plastic bags or tightly closed containers, during times of the year when they are not being worn. Dry cleaning will kill eggs, larvae and adults in the fabric.

Homes can become infested by Clothes Moths either by infested clothing or other fabric materials being brought in, or simply by the moths flying from house to house. Lint from wool rugs, pet hair and similar materials accumulating in furniture and along and behind baseboards are common sources of ongoing infestation. In general, good housekeeping practices are enough to control Clothes Moth infestations.

