

Pest Fact sheet No 9

Booklice

Name Common booklouse, psocid

Latin name *Liposcelis bostrychophila*

Size Adult 1mm long

Nymphs are 0.2 – 0.8 mm long

Identification features

Adult



Details can only be seen with a microscope or strong hand lens. Very small, translucent, pale grey or fawn, rounded insects with no wings and a segmented body. They have a large head with long thin antennae.

Nymphs

Nymphs are like small adults, but are very pale and nearly transparent.



Life cycle

The adults will run around very quickly when disturbed. They will only live in damp conditions and the tiny nymphs live in or very close to damp food where they feed and grow. The length of the life cycle is normally 6 months but depending upon the temperature, humidity and the nutrition of the food, it can be as short as 6 weeks at 25°C. This species is parthenogenetic, which means that there are no males and therefore all adults can lay eggs. This can result in very rapid “population explosions” when it is hot and damp and there is abundant food.

Signs of Infestation

Adults are frequently found in very small numbers on insect traps in many houses and museums. They are only seen in larger numbers in books, papers and packaging in warm, damp areas.

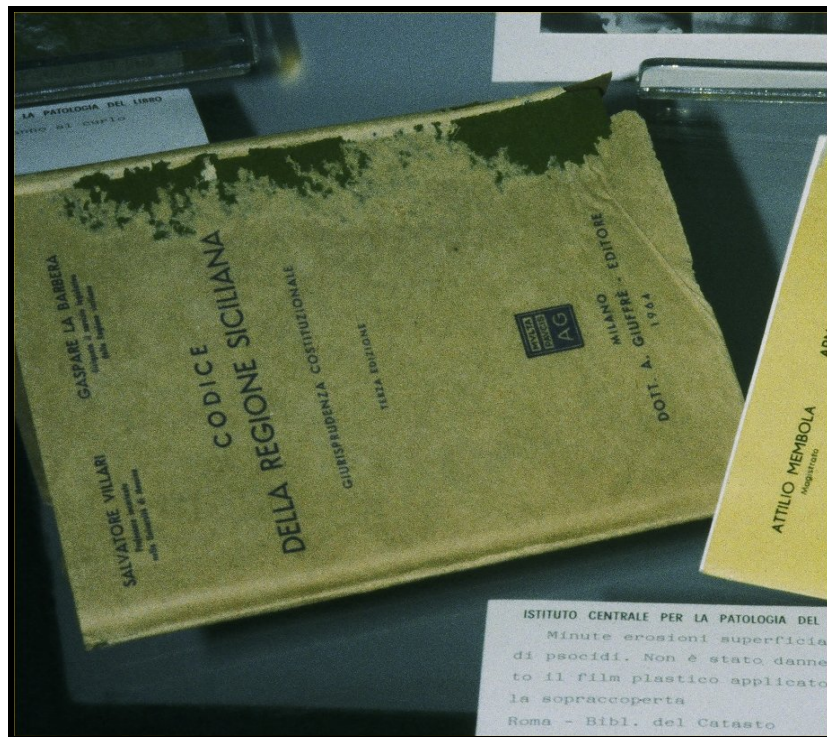
Materials damaged

They are pests of starchy food and are often found in flour, cereals and baby food. However they will also attack paper, packaging, books, prints, drawings and labels when there is a coating of starch, gelatine or animal glue. They will also eat microscopic mould.

Signs of damage

Booklice scratch the surface of paper and books leaving bare or translucent patches. As they are very small it takes a very large number of booklice to cause noticeable damage.

Book cover damaged by booklice



A lot of damage to paper which is attributed to booklice, has in fact been caused by silverfish. [See Fact sheet 8]

Written by David Pinniger

Prevention

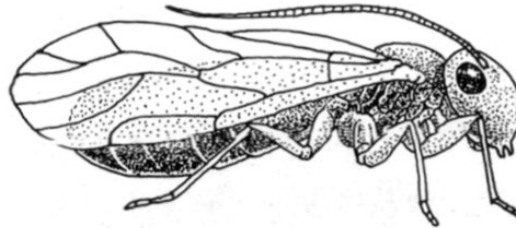
The key factors for booklice are warm, damp conditions and they will only cause damage when collections are kept at high humidity.

Similar species

Death watch booklouse, *Trogium pulsatorium*, similar to *Liposcelis*, but with a speckled body.

Black booklouse *Lepinotus patruelis*, adults are larger and very dark. They are sometimes found on packaging and need cooler, damper conditions than *Liposcelis*.

Winged booklice or barklice, many species with small sometimes hairy or shell-like wings. All live outside, but occasionally they will enter buildings and get caught on the edge of sticky traps in large numbers.



Winged booklouse