


Pest Fact sheet No 3 Death watch beetle

Name Death watch beetle

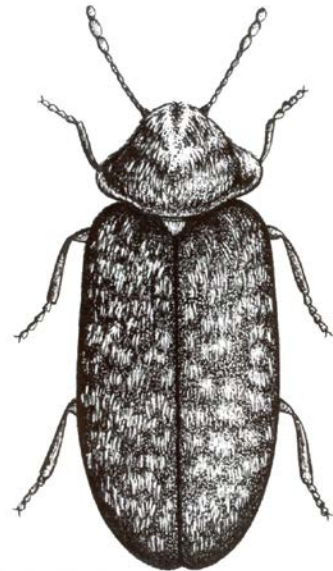
Latin name *Xestobium rufovillosum*

Size  Adult 4 mm – 6 mm long

Larvae 0.5 mm – 8 mm long. Not normally seen as they are in the wood.

Identification features

Adult



Dark brown elongated beetles with patches of yellow scales on the wing cases.

Head is not usually visible from above and the thorax is the shape of a tricorn hat [like Nelson's].

Maybe confused with furniture beetle which is much smaller without scales[Fact sheet 2]

Why is it called “Death watch beetle”?

Because the male beetles bang their head on the wood making a tapping noise.

Larva

Larvae are not normally seen as they live in tunnels in the wood.

They are creamy white and strongly curved in a C shape with short legs at the front.



Life cycle

Adult beetles will lay eggs in cracks or tunnels in wood. When the larvae hatch, they tunnel into the wood. They live their whole life inside the tunnels which get larger as they grow.

The larvae may take 4 to 12 years to complete their growth and then they pupate near the surface of the wood. The adult bites its way out in Spring or early Summer making a characteristic 2-3mm diameter round exit hole.

Signs of damage Emergence holes in wood.

Old holes will look dark and dirty.



New holes will look fresh and sharp

You will often find stunned or dead beetles on the floor underneath infested timbers



Fresh holes will have piles of bore dust, called frass, underneath



Frass pellets are round and large [the size of a small pinhead] and will roll around when moved.



Materials damaged

They will mainly attack hardwoods, particularly oak. They will damage sound sapwood and heartwood which has been damp or water damaged. The fungus in the damp wood breaks down the wood structure and also provides nutrients.

Severe attack of beams can hollow the beam and result in structural failure.



Ceiling timber has been attacked in this area because there has been water leakage from the roof above.



Is the infestation active?

This can sometimes be very difficult to establish. Holes do not mean that the infestation is active.

Look for fresh frass and new adult beetles in the Spring near undisturbed objects or timbers.

Paste tissue paper over beams with emergence holes and check in the Spring.

Fresh emergence holes through the paper will be very obvious



Old frass is not a sign of active infestation as it will often fall out of cracks and emergence holes when timbers dry and shrink.

Look for leaks and damp areas. Measure the moisture content of the wood, if it is above 16%, then the beetles will be able to breed.

Similar woodboring species

No others as large in the UK, except for house longhorn beetle, which is much larger and confined to a small area West of London