

Getting To Know ... **BOOK LICE**



EL NINO, LA NINA ...

Book Lice, Lah!

First we had the El Nino weather that cast a dry spell in this region, accompanied by forest fires and the haze.

Now we have the La Nina, bringing uncharacteristic rains, which are forecasted to prolong into early 1999.

With continuous rains will come high relative humidity that will promote microscopic moulds and fungi growth. An abundance of moulds and fungi means a plentiful supply of food for book lice, resulting in a noticeable presence of hundreds of this nuisance pest. It is thought that their dead bodies in house dust can contribute to asthmatic attacks.

Sometimes book lice do serve a useful purpose. For example, some species are predators of the eggs of stored product insects like the Angoumois grain moth, *Sitotroga cerealella* and the Indianmeal moth, *Plodia interpunctella*. Unfortunately their presence on food meant for human consumption is simply not acceptable.

There are more than 200 species of book lice (or psocids) and most of them are outdoor inhabitants, commonly found on the bark of trees and scrubs. Some species are winged but the ones that live indoors are usually wingless or with reduced wings, and appear flattened. The wingless species have been mistaken for termite nymphs.

The common species found worldwide are:

- Banded psocid, *Liposcelis bostrychophila*,
- Cereal psocid, *Liposcelus decolor*,
- Common booklouse, *Liposcelis divinatorius*,
- Deathwatch psocid, *Trogium pulsatorium*, and
- Grain psocid, *Liposcelis entomophila*.

The book louse is a very small (about 1.5 mm long), soft-bodied insect. It is colourless when young and will grow into a grey or light brown adult. Its presence is often difficult to detect with the naked eye but it becomes more conspicuous when it clusters around in hundreds.

This insect develops as quickly as one month from egg to adult, through gradual metamorphosis. The eggs hatch in one to three weeks and the nymphs take another three to four weeks to mature into adults. Given favourable conditions, the adults can live for three months.

The typical indoor places where these can be found are:

- In older buildings – in damp books, gully traps, under bath tubs with leaking or sweating pipes, straw matting, upholstered furniture containing hemp or jute fibres, in cardboard cartons and abandoned bird nests under the roof,
- In new homes, apartments and offices – in wall voids and on wall plasters which have not dried out after construction,
- In warehouses, provision shops and granaries – in grain spillage and wooden pallets that have gotten damp, and
- In museums, libraries, herbaria and insectariums – in damp exhibits and furniture.

The most effective way to get rid of this scavenger pest indoors is to eliminate dampness. This is achieved by proper ventilation of the rooms. All infested furniture and materials should be put under the sun to dry out the moulds and fungi growth and also to desiccate the book lice. If the problem persists, it may be necessary to install a dehumidifier in the room to reduce the humidity to below 50%. On a smaller scale, cupboards and bookshelves can be kept dry with the use of drying agents such as silica gel.

Should you need any assistance, call Aardwolf Pestkare. We have the chemical means to safely eliminate the problem. 
