



## Bare Trees and Snow Fleas

Snow fleas are really not fleas at all, but a type of insect called a springtail. Springtails get their name because they jump by means of a structure on their abdomen called a furculum. They are very small, about 1/16 inch long, and are usually dark with a short antennae. They must be near moisture and some species prefer snow. However, snow fleas and other springtails can live outdoors in snow, soil, leaf litter, mosses, fungi, and in areas by pools, hot tubs, and overly well-irrigated lawns.

If you find springtails indoors, this often indicates that you have a moisture problem or plumbing leak. Their numbers can explode into large populations if left untreated.

They eat dead plant matter, bacteria, fungi, algae and pollen. (They do not feed upon the blood

of mammals or other hosts like real fleas do.) In fact, they cause no harm, but their presence, often in great numbers, can be considered a nuisance by a homeowner.

During very cold winter days snow fleas are not very active, but if temperatures warm up, they will become active, hopping around on snow mounds and banks looking for food. They look like a fine black dust or pepper, against the white background of the snow.

Snow fleas are useful outdoors because they help break down old dead plant matter and other items in the ground. However, in large numbers they are not welcome, so, if you see a blooming population of snow fleas or springtails around moist areas of your home, give us a call.



## Carpenter Ants

If you stumble upon a midnight procession of large black ants in your bathroom this winter or wake one cold morning to find sawdust sprinkled around your furniture, you are probably living with carpenter ants. Carpenter ants are aptly named because they build their homes in wood. Carpenter ants do not eat wood but carve out smooth galleries in wood to rear their young.

They prefer to infest wood that has been damaged by moisture in some way, especially wood with a moisture content greater than 15 percent. If you see them in your home it may indicate that you have a moisture problem or leak. Check kitchens, bathrooms, gutters, and window/door frames for potential leaks or a build up-of moisture.

Carpenter ants live naturally in the forest and infest stumps and damaged or dying trees. They are good at follow-the-leader and can often be seen marching along a trail to locate food or other resources. They have been known to



# Carpenter Ants (continued from page 1)



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Photo: <http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu/HomeHort/F1Column/2002Articles/GraphicsInsects/carpantKentCoopExt.jpg>

follow wires, utility conduits, vines, and tree branches right into your home.

Although they prefer to find areas in your home that match the damaged, moist wood description, they sometimes will also infest healthy wood. They may even establish a secondary nest site within your home. As they carve their galleries, they leave telltale sawdust shavings. All this carving can compromise the integrity of structural timbers within your home.

If you think you have carpenter ants in your home, call us immediately! We can treat the problem and recommend ways to exclude this pest, such as trimming back trees, branches and vines around your home's perimeter, and sealing up openings around the conduit wire and cable entry points. The most important and often most difficult part of carpenter ant control is locating the nest sites. Once the nest has been found, control is straightforward. Sometimes more than one colony is present in the structure or on its grounds, so an initial thorough inspection is very important.

To prevent carpenter ant re-infestations after control is achieved, be sure to trim all trees and bushes back from the home. Check that branches do not touch or come into physical contact with the house. Repair moisture problems such as leaking roofs, chimneys or plumbing, as well as poorly ventilated attics, crawl spaces and blocked gutters. Replace rotted or water-damaged wood and eliminate wood to soil contacts. Remove dead stumps within 50 feet of the house, if practical, and repair trees with damage at broken limbs, and holes in the trunk. Seal cracks and crevices in the home's foundation, especially at utility chase entry points. Be sure to store firewood off the ground



Carpenter ants are large, black ants who build their homes in wood.



Carpenter ants carve out smooth galleries in wood.

away from the house, bring in only enough firewood to be used up quickly, and be sure to examine the firewood first for pests. Consider non-organic mulches near the house in heavily-infested ant areas. High moisture conditions must be eliminated to help control carpenter ants and to prevent future attacks. ■



## The Emperor Has No Clothes

Check the racks of your local thrift store and you're bound to find heaps of wool coats and sweaters riddled with moth holes. Who *hasn't* found little holes in their favorite cashmere cardigan or wool sportcoat? It's common this time of year to unpack your cold weather clothes and find damage done by clothes moth larvae.

There are two kinds of clothes moths encountered in homes. Clothes moths, more specifically known as either the webbing clothes moth or the casemaking clothes moth, are occasional fabric pests. Their larvae will feed on any animal fibers containing proteins, including fur, wool and wool blends, silk, hair, feathers/down, mohair, cashmere, and more. You could find damage (or the larvae themselves) on woolen clothing, carpets, rugs, upholstered furniture, furs, stored wool, animal bristles in hair brushes, and even woolen felts on piano keys. Synthetics or fabrics such as cotton may also be fed upon if they are blended with wool. Larvae may use cotton fibers to make their pupal cases. Damage generally occurs in hidden areas such as under collars or cuffs of clothing, in crevices of upholstered furniture, and in areas of carpeting covered by furniture. Fabrics stained by foods, drinks or perspiration, are usually more subject to damage.

Clothes moths are weak flyers and are not attracted to lights. They tend to hide when disturbed, and for this reason, infestations of clothes moths are not usually noticed until damaged fabrics, furs, or feathers are found. Close examination of the objects reveals the presence of silken webs that are spun by the larvae as they begin to pupate and also chew holes from larval feeding. Because adult moths are weak flyers and not attracted to lights, they are usually found very close to the infested items, such as in dark areas of closets. Adults are golden colored with reddish golden hairs on top of the head. Wings, with a span of about 1/2 inch, are fringed with a row of golden hairs and larvae are small and cream colored.

Heated buildings enable clothes moths to continue development even during the winter months. Generally, developmental

time for the clothes moth from egg to egg is between four to six months, and there are generally two generations a year.

Call us for advice on how best to tackle clothes moth issues. You can do a lot to prevent clothes moth damage by dry cleaning and then storing your valuable winter woolens and similar type of materials in **airtight** containers over the summer months. To reduce the possibility of infestations, periodically clean areas of a home that may harbor clothes moths. These areas include many seldom-cleaned spots, such as under heavy pieces of furniture, along baseboards, in cracks where hair and debris accumulate, closets, heaters and vents. The vacuum cleaner is the best tool for most of this cleaning. After using the vacuum in infested areas, freeze the bag, then dispose of it promptly. Bags can pick up eggs, larvae, or adult moths.

Clothes moths may first become established on woolen garments or scraps stored for long periods. If such articles are to be saved, they should be stored properly, or periodically hung in the sun and brushed thoroughly, especially along seams and in folds and pockets. Brushing destroys eggs and exposes larvae. Larvae are strongly repelled by light, and will fall from clothing when they cannot find protection. If these proactive measures do not work, then call us, and we can provide a trapping and mating disruption strategy as well as other materials known to be effective on clothes moths. ■



Casemaking clothes moth larva



Casemaking clothes moth



## Not a Creature Was Stirring ... Not Even a Mouse?

Photo: <http://www.naturephoto-cz.com/photos/andera/house-mouse-15372.jpg>

House mice consume and contaminate food meant for humans, pets, livestock, or other animals. They can transmit pathogens that cause diseases such as salmonellosis, which is a form of food poisoning.

**Y**ou know the holiday poem and, now that the holidays are upon us, you may see a rodent in your home. The house mouse (*Mus musculus*) is one of the most troublesome and economically important rodents in the United States. House mice thrive even in harsh conditions as long as they can find food, warmth and shelter. Typically found in and around homes and structures as well as in open fields. House mice consume and contaminate food meant for humans, pets, livestock, or other animals. They can transmit pathogens that cause diseases such as salmonellosis, which is a form of food poisoning. Their fur, urine and droppings can cause various illnesses, including allergies, asthma and infestations of ticks or fleas. In addition, mice can cause considerable damage to structures and property through their gnawing actions (the number one reason of unexplained house fires in the United States is attributed to rodents gnawing on wires.)

If you think you have a rodent infestation, call us immediately. (Telltale signs of rodent infestation include nests, droppings, fresh gnaw marks, or tracks.) We are rodent experts and can eliminate any infestation your home may be experiencing.

Since house mice are so small, they can gain entry into homes and other buildings much more easily than rats. As a result, house mouse infestations are probably 10 to 20 times more common than rat infestations. Effective control involves sanitation, exclusion, and population reduction. A key to successful long-term mouse control is the limitation of shelter, food and water wherever possible. Trapping works well when mice are not numerous or it can be used as a follow-up measure after a baiting program, but exclusion keeps them out in the first place. So, let us help you to identify weak points where mice may be gaining access to your home, so that they do not become pests in the first place. ■



### **Nesting Instinct:**

Telltale signs of rodent infestation include nests, droppings, fresh gnaw marks, or tracks.

