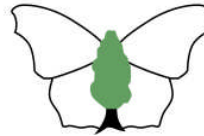


Potential and occasional problem species



Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

Clothes Moths (members of the family Tineidae) and House Moths (members of the family Oecophoridae)

Usually reported: All year round.

Potential problem: There are only two species of Clothes Moth that are now usually encountered, the Case-bearing Clothes Moth *Tinea pellionella* and the Common Clothes Moth *Tineola bisselliella*, this sometimes referred to as the Webbing Clothes Moth. The caterpillars feed on woollen fabrics and other animal fibres, including hair, fur and feathers, and occasionally build up in numbers to damage carpets, clothing etc. There are a few other species which are much less frequent, some of these having their origin beyond these shores as they are very occasionally imported into this country, which can cause similar damage. One such is the Tapestry Moth *Trichophaga tapetzella* which was formerly widespread and troublesome, but is now rarely encountered in this country. There are many closely related species which occur naturally in the wild and do not cause damage to woollen fibres etc.

Identification: Encountered in both the adult and the caterpillar stage, although it is the caterpillar stage that is directly associated with any damage. The Case-bearing Clothes Moth is generally greyish-brown with two or three darker spots on the forewing, often being slightly glossy in appearance. The Common Clothes Moth has a reddish or

orangey-red head with golden-yellow wings. The adults sit with their wings held over their back and are often encountered singly, resting on walls or ceilings, usually being found in darker areas.

The caterpillars of the former feeds from within a portable case. Those of the Common Clothes Moth feed from within flimsy white silken tubes to which particles of its food are adhered, and silken webbing, sometimes in the form of a mat covering several caterpillars, is generally associated with the feeding site, this can appear 'messy'. These cases or silken webbing are usually obvious and closely associated with any damage.

- Case-bearing Clothes Moth wingspan 9 to 16mm, case of the caterpillar 7-9mm
- Common Clothes Moth wingspan 9 to 16mm

Confusion species: In the adult stage there are many other species which are superficially similar, although in most cases these should be living outdoors. There are two other species frequently found within houses, the White-shouldered House-moth *Endrosis sarcitrella* and the Brown House-moth *Hofmannophila pseudospretella*, these are not clothes moths. The former does not usually cause serious damage in the domestic environment, whilst the latter can

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occasionally damage fabrics, woollen carpets etc. Their caterpillars are scavengers, usually feeding from within silken tubes amongst dust and fine debris on dead insects and other dead animal and vegetable material. Both moths are generally larger than the clothes moths.



White-shouldered House-moth (Photo: D. Green)



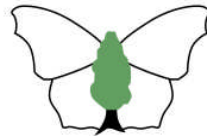
Brown House-moth (Photo: M. Parsons)

Distribution: Both the Case-bearing Clothes moth and Common Clothes Moth are widely found in Britain and Ireland and outbreaks occur sporadically. The introduction of artificial fibres, more effective pesticides and possibly the rise of central heating have been suggested reasons for a decline of clothes moths.

Ecology: The Case-bearing Clothes Moth generally has two generations indoors, with the adult usually found from June to October. The Common Clothes Moth is continuously brooded indoors, although it may be less numerous at some times of year. The caterpillars of both species feed on a wide range of materials of animal origin. Caterpillar numbers can build and many can be found together. It is thought that these species' natural habitat in the wild is in association with bird's nests, the nests of social Hymenoptera (bees and wasps) etc.

Possible control measures: Firstly confirm identification; there can be damage to carpets, clothing etc. which is not caused by clothes moths, that is superficially similar, such as that by the larval stage of the carpet beetle. The caterpillars of clothes moths generally prefer dark, undisturbed, slightly soiled and slightly damp or high humidity conditions where numbers can build up, such as under sofas, beds and other furniture. Frequent cleaning in these areas should deter clothes moths. In some cases, where the outbreak is limited to clothing, freezing affected garments (to at least -18°C) for several days may help reduce numbers. Clean clothing etc. that is to be stored should be sealed within polythene bags. The natural home of clothes moths are bird and animal nests – check for blocked chimneys and flues or for nests in attics eaves and remove and destroy any old nest material.

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Repellents can be used, although old moth ball formulations such as naphthalene are now banned or not recommended. Lavender and cedar balls must be replaced regularly and work best in enclosed spaces, but will not have any effect on an existing infestation.

When a larger infestation is suspected, regular cleaning may reduce numbers, although expert advice, such as from a pest control agency, may need to be sought to ensure appropriate control. Clothes moth control will not be achieved rapidly and good housekeeping, such as safe storage and regular checking of susceptible items is essential.

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