


Webbing Clothes Moth

Tineola bisselliella

Identification

Size (Actual Size) 	1/4 inch to 3/8 inch (7-10 mm) in length with a wingspread of about 3/8 inch (10 mm)
Color - Adult	Clothes moths are small, straw-colored, yellow-tan, or buff-colored insects, with narrow wings fringed with hairs. A tuft of hairs on the head is upright and coppery to reddish-gold in color.
Color - Larva	The larva is whitish colored with a brown to black head.

General Information

Webbing clothes moths were likely introduced into the United States before the 1860's. They often travel with clothing, rugs or other belongings containing wool or other natural animal products. The larval (worm) stage alone is responsible for damage to materials. The adult moths lack functional, chewing mouthparts. Damage is most often concentrated in dark areas, crevices or creases in their preferred food. Examples of these dark areas could be; under furniture and cushions, where carpets and textiles are folded and in garments under collars, cuffs and folds.

Adult clothes moths are secretive and are often found in these darkened places. They will attempt to hide when disturbed and will often run, hop or fly short distances to escape. They are weak fliers compared to other moth species. The males are much more active fliers than the females. Males actively seek out female moths in order to mate. Males and females can penetrate through surprisingly narrow cracks as they find their way in storage cabinets and boxes. Once mated, females look for suitable food sources to lay their eggs. The extremely small larvae can find their way into many storage containers that appear to be pest-proof.



Webbing clothes moth adult, larvae and pupal cases
Photo: Michael Rust



Life History, Food & Signs of Infestation

Insect Life Cycle Information	Generally, developmental time for the clothes moth from egg to adult in room temperature with a good food source is approximately 45 days. Mating and egg laying begins almost immediately after adults emerge from the pupa. Adult moths do not feed and die within one month. Female moths can lay up to 57 small, pinhead-sized, white eggs on or near the fabric, clothing, or furnishing they infest.
Food & Feeding	Clothes moth larvae feed on woolens, mohair, feathers, fur, hair, leather, dead insects and dried animal carcasses. Infestations occur in clothing, carpets, rugs, furs, fabrics, blankets, stored wool products, upholstery, mounted animals, piano felts, fish meal, milk powder, and brush bristles. The caterpillar may feed on fabrics of vegetable origin or synthetics, if the fabrics are mixed with wool, or may use such materials to construct their cocoons. Synthetics, cottons, and other plant materials are not attacked by the webbing clothes moth larvae unless these items are stained with food or body oils. Although synthetics may be ingested, they cannot be digested.
Signs of Infestation	A clothes moth infestation is often detected from damaged fabrics and by the presence of silken webs spun by the larvae, sometimes producing only scattered patches of silk. The webbing clothes moth larva spins silk as a tunnel or sheet of webbing across the attacked material under which it grazes. Damage is accompanied by copious webbing tubes or sheets which frequently include large amounts of frass, and infestations appear far more 'messy' than the damage caused by <i>Tinea pellionella</i> (case-making clothes moth).



Webbing clothes moth damage and fecal pellets on feather
Photo: Patrick Kelley