

## WOODWORM

Few stick dressers totally escape the ravages of woodworm and unfortunately some householders encounter similar problems. Woodworm is the common term used to refer to the larvae of all wood boring beetles. There are approximately 30 species found in the UK that bore into timber but those of greatest significance are the common furniture beetle, death-watch beetle (*Xestobium rufuvillosum*), house longhorn beetle (*Hylotrupes bajulus*), powder post beetle (*Lyctus brunneus*) and the ambrosia beetles (*Platypus spp.*)

Most of the damage seen by stick dressers caused by the larvae of the common furniture beetle (*Anobium punctatum*).

Different species of wood boring beetles colonise different types of wood. Some prefer softwoods whilst others prefer hardwoods. All wood boring beetles favour wood that is moist because it is softer. Freshly cut shanks or those that are relatively unseasoned, are at the highest risk.

The common furniture beetle can be found in both softwoods and hardwoods but for stick dressers hazel appears to be a preferred host. Female beetles tend to choose hardwoods with moisture content of 28% or higher to give their larvae the best chance of pupating into adults. However, they can be found living in timber down to 12% moisture content. The dryer the wood gets the harder it becomes for them to feed. Common furniture beetle larvae will only feed in the sapwood because it has more nutrients and is toxin free, unlike the inner heartwood of timbers such as pine and oak.

### Life-cycle

Woodworm larvae are seldom seen but are small, creamy white coloured 'maggots' and have curved bodies. The adult common furniture beetle is a brown winged beetle, typically 3-4mm in length.

There are four stages of woodworm development: egg, larva, pupa and adult beetle. The female lays eggs in moist timber, preferably the sapwood of freshly felled trees or branches outside. The larvae burrow beneath the surface and live for three to five years before pupating and emerging as adults. Adult emergence usually takes place in the summer months (May to October).

Exit holes are probably the most obvious sign, but they do not occur until the adult beetles are ready to leave the timber. Often the first indication for the stick dresser is when shanks are being straightened and the mines beneath bark become obvious or where cutting reveals the tiny tunnels in the wood. Damaged shanks stored in bundles on a flat surface may show the fine powder of beetle droppings (frass) but by the time this is seen the damage will have been done.

### Control

In the past a number of persistent insecticides (such as gamma-HCH) were available but these are no longer on the market. A range of chemical treatments

are currently available based on the insecticide permethrin but this gives a relatively short period of control so that repeat applications should be applied.

Applications of paraffin (kerosene) or borax (boracic acid) solution to the outside of shanks will also provide control but repeat applications may again be required. Oils such as rosemary oil are claimed to give control but are expensive.

There is no guaranteed way of preventing infestations but probably the best approach is to apply the insecticide soon after cutting the shanks and again in the following summer. Annual repeat applications may be required if shanks are to be stored for several years

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