



What's Eating Your Collection?

How to check objects for signs of infestation

Using blunder traps to monitor for insects is an important part of any IPM programme, but it can only show part of the problem. Traps only catch those insects that have chosen to move around within the space. If insects have found a plentiful food source, they have no need to move around and may only do so when the object on which they were feeding has been reduced to a pile of dust. It is thus important to check objects on a regular basis as well as traps

- Check objects that might be vulnerable to insect attack. Look at those made from wool, fur, feathers and (soiled) silk. These materials are prone to attack from clothes moths and carpet beetles. Also check wood (for woodborers), plant materials, paper based materials and other starchy materials such as salt dough.
- Pay particular attention to those objects that are kept in warm, dark, damp, undisturbed conditions, i.e. in boxes in damp stores.
- There is a nationwide increase in the population of clothes moths (*Tineola bisselliella* and *Tinea pellionella*) so it is perhaps sensible to check those objects that are vulnerable to moth attack.
- Use IPM to find out what insects are most common in your museum and check objects that are vulnerable to attack by that insect.
- Mark boxes and cabinets to show where vulnerable objects are located. This will reduce the amount of boxes/cabinets that need to be checked.
- Insects like to be undisturbed and in the dark. It therefore follows that there is little point checking the side of the object that can be easily seen. Look at the back, the underside, underneath pocket flaps, inside car boots etc.
- Object checking can be integrated into a housekeeping programme. As objects are cleaned, they are checked. If the housekeeping occurs regularly an infestation will be found quickly, but it is also much less likely to occur.
- Check the environmental conditions. Areas with high RH and high temperatures are more likely to have an active insect infestation and thus objects in these areas should be checked more regularly.
- If the temperature and RH are not allowed to be too high and if the collection is accessed regularly then checking can be less frequent, perhaps every two years rather than annually. If an infestation is found, it would be wise to increase the frequency of checking.