



Clothes Moths

Eric Day, Department of Entomology, Virginia Tech

Description: Two species of Clothes Moth occur in Virginia and damage wool and animal products.

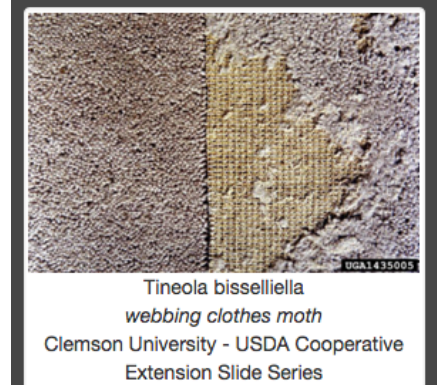
The **Webbing Cloths Moth**, *Tineola bisselliella*, is commonly found under wool carpets and other situations where wool or hides rest on a floor or a surface. The larva is a caterpillar that can be up to ½ inch long and has a shiny hairless pale appearance. Often the color of the dye on the wool on which they feed is visible through their bodies. In addition to leaving webbing where they feed, they also make web tunnels and leave droppings. The adult is a very small yellow moth with long hairs on the head.

The **Casemaking Clothes Moth**, *Tinea pellionella*. Is commonly found on yarn, wool clothes, wool rugs, and animal hides such as lambskin rugs. The caterpillars are up to ½ inch long and cover themselves with bags that they make from the material they feed upon. This bag often matches the color. The first indication of casemaking clothes moths are often its tiny caterpillars crawling out of boxes and bags that contain wool or hides making their presence known as little moving spots on the wall. The adult casemaking clothes moths are very small, yellowish to slightly gold-colored moths with narrow, slightly pointed wings. They are not attracted to lights and usually hide when disturbed.

Habitat: In houses where wool is available; also, in the wild on dead animals hides.

Life Cycle: Female clothes moths lay 40-50 eggs that hatch in 4 to 21 days. The life cycle is about 65 to 90 days. Clothes moths are in the order Lepidoptera, family Tineidae.

Type of Damage: Larvae like to feed on wool cloths or rugs. Also will feed and damage objects made from animal hair or hides with hair still attached. Clothes moths can feed on wool products, such as clothing, carpets, rugs, furs, fabrics, blankets,



and piano felts. They may feed on fabrics of vegetable origin (cotton) if the fabrics are mixed with wool or soiled with food particles. Clothes moths can do serious damage to small or large wool rugs. The caterpillars can feed on the underside of the rug for a long time—doing considerable damage—before they are detected. See also Virginia Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet on Carpet Beetles.

Control options for both types of clothes moth:

Cleaning: Clean all wool clothing and blankets at least once a year. Follow all precautions on label for suggested cleaning methods. Inspect all objects for cloths moths as well as carpet beetles. Completely vacuum wool carpets and rugs and be sure to lift up and inspect the undersides for activity. Move furniture if necessary to get to all sections, as furniture can make a protected location for clothes moths.

Trapping: Traps baited with a pheromone will act as an early detection for clothes moths and may provide control in limited infestations.

Dry Ice: If the infested wool items can be placed in an airtight container, consider adding dry ice. The CO₂ gas given off by the ice will fumigate and kill the clothes moths. Do not place the dry ice directly on the clothing.

Storage: Store wool items in a tight chest or airtight plastic container. Consider using moth flakes or mothballs and plan to air out the items in the fall outside to get rid of the smell. Wooden chests lined with eastern red cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, are promoted for clothes moth control. This cedar contains a specific oil that kills small larvae but not full-grown larvae. It also wears off after a few years. Tight fitting well made chests will keep out the clothes moths.

Freezing and heating: Cloths moths can be killed by placing the wool item in an oven at 120°F for 30 minutes or all day in a hot car or van on a sunny mid summer day. Also clothes moths can be controlled by placing them in a freezer that is lower than 18°F for 24 hours.

Fur and Furniture: Inspect all fur coats for clothes moth activity and have professionally cleaned if found infested. Some furniture is made with animal hair or filled with wool. Check for signs of infestation and consider fumigating with dry ice in a large plastic bag if clothes moths are found.

Interesting Facts: Clothes moths will not feed on carpets made from synthetic material.

Replaces: VCE Fact Sheet: 3104-1576