BOHART
Museum of Entomology
University of California, Davis

INFORMATION

Silverfish

Silverfish, courtesy of Alex Wild; myrmecos.net.

Silverfish are primitive insects commonly found indoors. They are flattened, wingless insects, covered with scales that give them a silvery appearance. Silverfish also have distinctive long thread-like antennae and three, long, slender filaments (cerci) extending from the last segment of the abdomen. They are generally about 1/2 inch (13 mm) long.
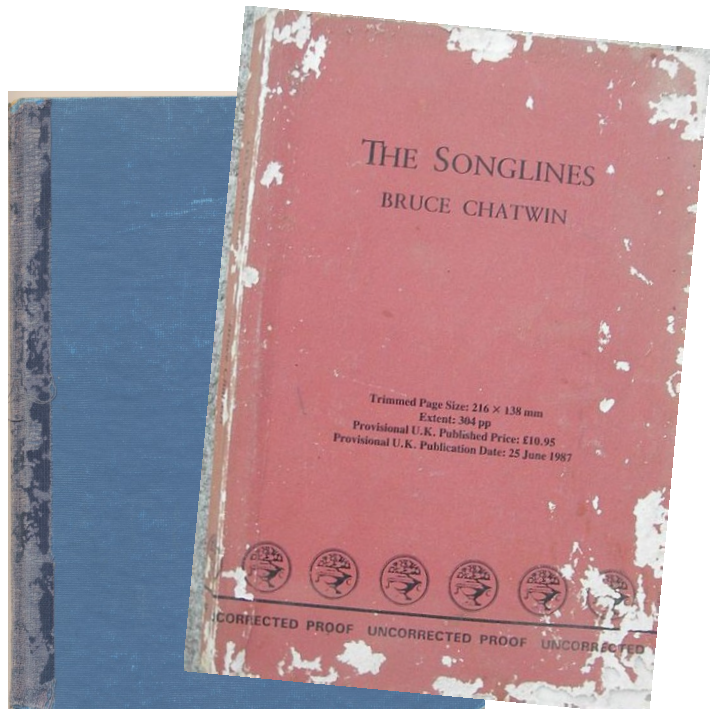
Silverfish are primarily nocturnal detritivores. They feed primarily on carbohydrates, such as starches and sugars. The common indoor species is cosmopolitan, transported by human activities. It is most abundant in sites with high relative humidity (between 75 and 95%). Indoors they are most abundant in attics, bathrooms and basements; all areas with higher humidity. However, they can also be found in kitchens.

These insects feed on a wide variety of materials that contain polysaccharides and dextrin. This list includes book bindings, carpets, clothing, various glues, paper, wall paper, starched fabrics, leather, photos, plaster, coffee and even dandruff.

Silverfish can make their way indoors in several ways. They can wander in from outside. More frequently they are brought indoors in contaminated materials. Once indoors they wander until they find a source of food.

These insects are more nuisances than serious pests. They can damage books, wallpaper and such but it takes a long time for them to do so. They can be used as indicators of moisture problems indoors—roof, window and plumbing leaks and damp basement walls, for example. They can be controlled by reducing humidity and sources of moisture and increasing ventilation

Control is rarely necessary for silverfish. If it is needed, diatomaceous earth powder carefully used can be effective. Several creatures prey on silverfish, including house centipedes and spiders.

Silverfish damaged books, left courtesy of LS Kimsey, photo right courtesy of Rodolph de Salis, Wikimedia Commons.

For more information and additional information pages go to:
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