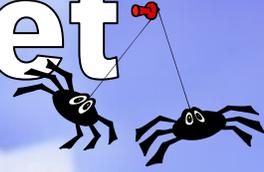


The Spinneret

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The holiday seasons are fast upon us and like many of you, we plan to travel to visit friends, children and relatives. Now that we're being blessed with grandchildren it won't be too many more seasons before we go from looking like Santa & Mrs. Clause to being Santa & Mrs. Clause. But I haven't bought the red suit yet. With any luck the hills will be covered with snow and I'll be tearing down a slope on a snowboard somewhere as you read this. The reindeer will just have to wait a little longer. From all of us at BEACON, we wish you the best of the season and a happy new year. - Ed. ■

The Travel Bug:

With the holiday seasons upon us many of us will be traveling. With travel comes the risk of an encounter of the very personal kind with bed bugs.



Photo Credit: Piotr Naskrecki

Until recently this pest was so rare that many professionals had never seen one except in books. In fact, even though I have been in pest control for almost 35 years, traveled most of the United States, much of Canada and parts of Europe, the first one I encountered wasn't until five years ago.

Because of changes in the products commonly used for maintenance pest control and the increased mobility of humans in general this pest has seen a resurgence throughout the world.

Bed bugs are easy to get but tough to get rid of. Frequently this is because infestations aren't detected until they are six to eight months old.

There are several reasons it takes so long to find out you have them. Immature bed bugs are so small that they can slip through the stitches on mattresses and bedding. They have an anesthetic in their saliva that allows them to bite us without causing any pain. They don't stay on us like fleas, ticks or lice. They are nocturnal and remain hidden off our bodies except when feeding. They can survive without feeding for six to eight months. In addition, many people will not develop a welt at the site of the bite until they have been exposed for several weeks.

So how do they get from place to place and into your home? People. Bed bugs don't live outside and invade our homes. They need people to move them from place to place. Even though they don't hide on our bodies they are adept at hitch-hiking on our belongings. It only takes one fertile female or a couple eggs or nymphs to start an infestation.

For the average homeowner the greatest risk is when we travel. When you travel you are sharing everything with everyone that has traveled before you. Once you check your bags, they go on the same conveyer belt into the same storage compartment as everybody else's. They go into the same taxi or rental car trunk as everybody else's. When you get to your room they go into the same closet as everybody else's.

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Honey Do:

Bats and birds have migrated for the winter so now is the time to seal off those openings into the attic that were filled with squeaking, cheeping critters all summer.

While screen and caulk are very effective at sealing most openings if it's time to repair the soffit vents (the holes between the rafters when you look at the underside of the roof from outside) now might be the time to consider upgrading the soffit to continuous vents.

This style vent is significantly more animal resistant and requires less maintenance than "bird blocks". ■



Bird Blocks



Continuous Vent Soffit

The Roof Rat:

The black rat, otherwise known as the Roof Rat is one of the most successful animals ever to exist on this planet. Once confined to tropical Asia it seems that Roman conquest and trade may have helped loose this animal upon Europe and Africa. As Europeans



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Roof Rat (*rattus rattus*)

colonized the world they carried roof rats to coastal settlements around the planet.

Roof Rats were once widely distributed and common in colonial towns. As towns evolved from cabins and agrarian communities into brick, mortar, and stone they were pushed out of most urban areas by their larger more sturdy cousins, Norway Rats (not actually from Norway but that's a story for another day). Norway rats have a more subterranean life style, somewhat like a ground hog, so they tend to compete better in the urban landscape.

Roof rats are arboreal, which is to say they have evolved to live in wooded areas. In fact, they have more in common with tree squirrels than other rodents.

Continued...

The Travel Bug:

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Then at end of the journey you carry all those belongings into your home.

Motels and cruise lines typically do a good job of providing clean linens but they don't change the mattress or bed frame. Few staff are trained to recognize bed bug activity even when they see it and even fewer establishments monitor to detect activity.

Bed bugs have been found living in aircraft, cruise ships, busses and even public transportation.

So, now that you're cringing at the thought of going out your front door what can you do to protect against these cryptic critters when you travel?

First, have a general idea of what a bed bug looks like. Imagine a reddish brown sesame seed about 1/4 inch long with 6 legs and you have a rough idea of what an adult looks like. Immature stages have the same shape but can be as small as 1.5 millimeter (that's small enough to crawl through the stitching on a mattress).

Second, before unpacking in a motel or stateroom take a few minutes for a brief inspection. Except in severe infestations, bed bugs seldom infest bathrooms so this is usually a good place to stage your bags while inspecting the room.

Bed bugs depend on us for food so if a room is infested the bed is the first place to look. Pull back the sheets from the mattress and check along the seams. You want to check for insects but also their droppings. Droppings look like someone has taken a dark brown or black felt tip marker and dabbed it on the fabric.

Most head boards are removable and can be lifted off the wall. Check the cracks for insects and droppings.

Check the back and top edges of the night stand. Pull the drawer out of the night stand and check the inside of the cabinet.

If these three places are clear you can be pretty sure the room is not infested.

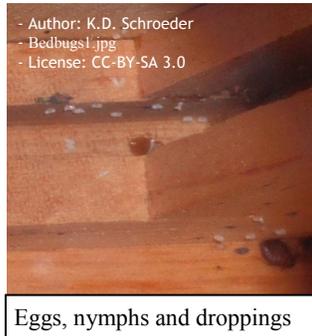
If you do find insects remember, this pest likely is limited to one or two rooms. Report them to the manager and ask for a pest free room.

Lastly, upon arriving home quarantine your luggage in the garage and launder your clothing. All stages of this insect are vulnerable to detergent and heat. At temperatures above 117 degrees they die in just a few minutes. Anything that can safely be put in the dryer on high heat can be rendered bug free in about 10 minutes.

Luggage can then be placed in plastic garbage bags with the end tied in a knot or taped shut for storage.

This may sound a bit involved but it is a lot easier than spending upwards of \$1000.00 and going through all the inconvenience of dismantling your home to treat for an infestation.

If somehow, they still manage to get into your home get professional help. Even if you want to attempt to treat an infestation yourself, getting professional guidance can prevent a lot of wasted effort.■



The Roof Rat:

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They even hunt birds and frequently build nests in trees where they rear their young.

Unlike squirrels they will also scavenge animal carcasses and eat just about any foodstuff from trashcans and mulch piles and some things we wouldn't consider food.

This rat seems to have been purposely designed to live with humans. If they can find an opening in a building they prefer living in our homes to building their own nests. They also prefer eating our garbage, stealing pet food or raiding the bird feeder to foraging.

Usually, the first sign one of these animals has made themselves at home is the sound of gnawing in the wall or attic.

No matter how annoying it is or how bad you want to get rid of the invader there is one thing you must not do. DO NOT put out poison unless you are prepared to live with the smell of rotting rat carcass for up to a month.

If you feel compelled to do something, use snap traps. That way you get the body. Don't bother with glue traps either unless you are unable to set a snap trap.

There is only one practical way to get rid of rats and that is to build them out.

There are things we encounter with almost every rat infestation that need repair:

- The access to the crawl under the home has openings that allow animals in. Often people believe the rain cover will prevent animals from entering but almost with out exception there are openings or they dig under the soil retainer.
- Screens in the foundation vents are damaged or rusted away.
- The four inch sewer line was passed through an eight inch hole in the foundation wall.
- The foundation footing is not buried and they can dig into the crawlspace.
- The home has a bay window or chimney box and there is no plywood panel covering the underside to prevent them from crawling over the foundation wall.
- The cap for the dryer duct is missing.
- The seal on bottom of the overhead garage door is damaged.
- There are tree branches on the roof.

In addition, if there are bird feeders or pet feeders then there will be a higher population and extra pressure from rodents to enter your home.

Contractors and architects are only human and often build things into homes that let rodents in. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes not.

An experienced inspector can find these flaws but sometimes the only way to do so would require significant deconstruction to find them.

As a home owner you may be able to maintain many of these elements yourself but if not BEACON Pest Control is a licensed and insured contractor and we're here to help.■