



BIRD MITES

"Bird mites", "Tropical fowl mites" or "Starling Mites" are the common names used to describe the mite *Ornithonyssus bursa* from the family of mites Macronyssidae. These mites are often incorrectly called 'bird lice' by some pest control companies. Bird mites are most active during Spring and early Summer.



Ornithonyssus bursa is a small but extremely mobile mite, barely visible to the eye, with eight legs (except the larva that has 6), oval in shape and with a sparse covering of short hairs. The mite is widely distributed throughout warmer regions of the world. It is a parasite, feeding on the blood of common birds including pigeons, starlings, sparrows, Indian mynahs, poultry, and some wild birds. Bird mites are semi-transparent in colour, which makes them difficult to detect on skin until blood is ingested and then digested; when they may appear reddish to blackish. They appear to be the size of a full stop or fly dirt you often need to look hard to see it moves.

Contact with humans usually occurs after birds gain entry to roof cavities via broken tiles or through unprotected eaves, of homes, factories, barns and other dwellings to construct their nests in early spring or summer. However, some infestations also occur from birds roosting on the outside of dwellings such as window ledges or awnings. The mites feed on the unfeathered nestlings, as well as the adult birds, and the large amount of nesting material used by the birds provide the mites with an ideal environment in which to thrive. The mites have a short life cycle (approximately 7 days) and can rapidly generate large populations.

When the young birds leave the nest, or die, many mites (often many tens of thousands) are left behind in the absence of a suitable host, and these will disperse from the nest into and throughout the dwelling searching for new hosts. Most mites will die within 3 weeks without a blood meal from a bird host. They will bite humans they encounter but cannot survive on humans.

The Bites

- Pinprick bites with or without lesions
- Frequently intense itching of the skin
- Vague sensation of crawling on the skin
- Bite marks and lesions that heal very slowly
- Increase of symptoms in certain areas of the home
- Increase of symptoms at night and in humid weather
- Physician suspects scabies but the treatment does not help

As a result of their 'test biting' while searching for a new bird host, the mites inject saliva. This can lead to severe irritation with rashes and intense itching. Scratching of the bites may result in secondary infections. Bird mites are not associated with the transmission of any infectious disease. The bites are often difficult to diagnose and can be mistaken for bites from a number of other arthropods.



The greatest impacts from bird mites are usually experienced in rooms close to the point of entry of the mites. The mites have no preference for any particular areas of the body and they do not live underneath the skin, nor can an infestation be maintained on humans. However, the problem will persist while the bird-related source of the mites remains. Until the infestation is controlled, the occupants of the building can experience considerable discomfort. Also, the sensation of crawling mites on the skin will irritate some people.

Severe reactions may have to be treated as for other allergic conditions with antihistamines. Unless steps are taken to control the mite infestation, symptoms resulting from bird mite bite will continue.

Treatment

Exopest recommend the treatment of the infested area using a synthetic pyrethroid or other registered pesticides or dusts. The roof or wall cavity to have insecticidal dust applied, the immediate rooms infested to have wall vents gaps in the cornices skirtings and cracks & crevices sprayed. We will also use an industrial aerosol knockdown or pyrethrum to kill adult mites requiring the occupants to vacate whilst application takes place or in some cases 2-4hours. We recommend that the client arrange for nesting material be removed if possible before treatment, but with the bad infestations it may mean doing it later after 2 months allowing the current infestation to die off.



Broken tiles or timber allowing access to roof cavities should be repaired and all potential entry points to the eaves and roof cavity blocked. Roosting and nesting sites on window ledges should be cleared and made unsuitable for future bird use