

Pest Fact sheet No 8 Silverfish and grey silverfish

Name Silverfish, fishmoth, bristletail

Latin name *Lepisma saccharina*

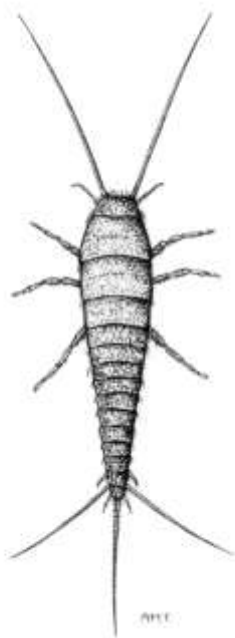
Size Adult 10-15mm long



Nymphs are 2-10mm long but are rarely seen

Identification features

Adult



Long, tapered, segmented insects covered in silver scales. They have long antennae and three long whip-like bristles at the back end of the body.

Nymphs

Nymphs are like small adults, but are translucent.

Written by David Pinniger

Life cycle of *Lepisma*

The adults will run around very quickly when disturbed. They will only lay eggs in damp conditions and the nymphs live in or very close to damp food where they feed and grow. The length of the life cycle is normally 6 - 12 months depending upon the temperature, humidity and the nutrition of the food.



Adults and nymphs on food

Signs of Infestation

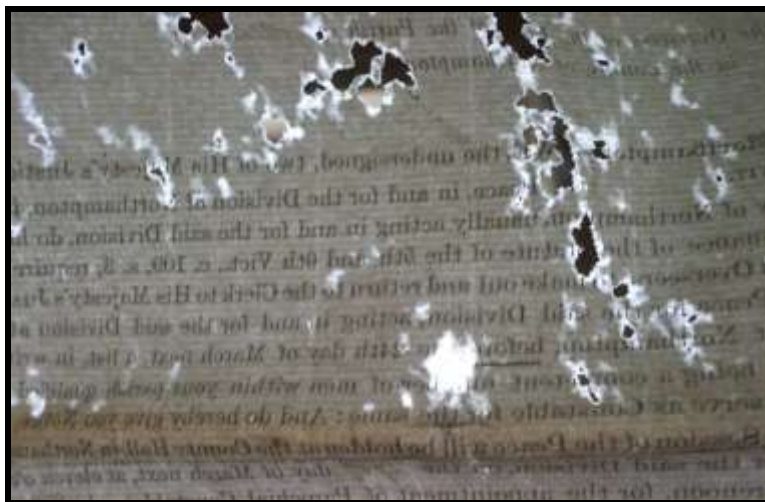
Adult *Lepisma* silverfish are frequently found in damp areas, such as bathrooms, toilets, kitchens and cellars.

Materials damaged

Paper, books, prints, drawings, photographs and labels. Occasionally they will attack silk and some other textiles. Silverfish particularly like materials with coatings of starch, gelatine or organic dyes. Flock wallpaper and wallpaper paste are often attacked. They also like microscopic mould, and greasy surface dirt from handling.

Signs of damage

Silverfish scratch the surface of paper and books leaving, bare or translucent patches.



They will eventually eat through the paper leaving holes with irregular thinned edges.



They will sometimes preferentially eat organic ink on labels and prints.



Frass

Silverfish produce frass which is cylindrical and larger than that produced by many insects

Prevention

The key factor for *Lepisma* silverfish is damp and they will only cause serious damage when collections are kept at high humidity.

Silverfish damage to wallpaper on a very damp wall



Written by David Pinniger

Grey Silverfish

This is a much larger species which has only recently been found in the UK. It is very common in many European countries and appears to be spreading rapidly.

Latin name

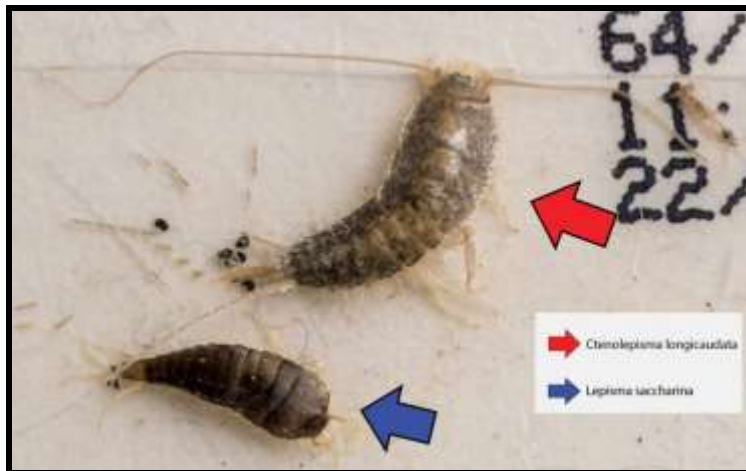
Ctenolepisma longicaudata

Size Adult 15 -20mm long



Distinguishing characteristics

The adults are covered with grey scales which may appear blotchy. There is a distinctive fringe of short bristles on the front of the head and down the sides of the body. The antennae are longer than the body and are longer than *Lepisma*. The three bristles at the back end are also longer than *Lepisma*.



[Image Courtesy of Abby Moore, Museum of London]

Written by David Pinniger

Nymphs

Nymphs are like small adults, but are more translucent, they also have bristles and long antennae like the adults, although this may not be as clear.

Life cycle and damage

Damage is very similar to *Lepisma*, but the main concern is that *Ctenolepisma* seems to be able to breed and cause damage at lower humidity than *Lepisma*. The risk to collections in storage or on display could therefore be greater.

Grey silverfish on a pest trap

