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Black Larder Beetle *Dermestes ater* (De Geer)



GENERAL INFORMATION

Larder beetles are cosmopolitan, distributed around the world in both tropical and temperate regions. There are two types of larder beetles, the larder beetle (*Dermestes lardarius*) and the black larder beetle (*Dermestes ater*). The black larder beetle are commonly used as "museum volunteers" to clean carcasses as part of the skeletization process of zoological specimens. Special care should be taken to contain the beetles and it is recommended that the dermestariums are located separate from collection areas.

SIGNS OF INFESTATION

Larder beetles damage museum specimens through feeding and there will be casts of their shed skins as they complete several molting stages on the way to maturity. They also can cause considerable structural damage to specimens or buildings when the larvae burrow pupal chambers.

FOOD SOURCES

Both the adults and larvae of larder beetles feed off a variety of animal-based foods, particularly raw skins, raw hides, and carcasses. The larvae, in particular, are ferocious eaters. Food choices also include bones, wool that has high-protein stains such as sweat or blood, furs, feathers, hair, stored tobacco, cured and dried meat, dish, stuffed animals, dead insects in wall voids including cluster flies, abandoned bird nests, dead rodents in wall partitions or chimneys, dead beehives, and even rat or mouse poison baits.

LIFE CYCLE



DIAGNOSTIC MORPHOLOGY

Adult: 9 mm long

- Antennae end in a 3 segmented club
- *Dermestes ater* (black larder beetle) is dark brown to black, without patterns. Gray hairs on the elytra. The underside has yellow patches.



Immature to Stage long,

- Yellowish brown with a narrow dorsal strip of a lighter color
- Two curved spines, or "hooks" on the anterior end

Larder beetles rest in winter and become active in the spring. The female larder beetle has the potential to lay hundreds of eggs, and these are laid singly or in small batches on the food source. Eggs hatch in two weeks or less.

The larva prefer darkness and the larval period can be from 15-80 days. After getting their fill of food and several molting stages, the mature larvae will burrow into materials such as bone, wood, cork, plaster, styrofoam, tin, or into cracks and crevices to create their pupal chambers. The pupal period is approximately two weeks. Adults can live up to 1.5 years and can fly.

The black larder beetle has a similar life cycle, but the adults live only two to three months.

CONTROL & TREATMENT

In the case of an infestation, isolate and bag the infested object or food source. Vacuum surrounding areas thoroughly including in cracks and crevices. Larder beetles are particularly prone to following cluster flies, so be sure to remove them.

There are a variety of pest management strategies to control infestations depending on the infested object. More aggressive methods may have to be taken to control the larvae if they are compromising a building structure. For information regarding pest control methods, please refer to the resources on the museumpests.net website.

Fact Sheet: Black Larder Beetle

Photo Credit for adult and larva: Patrick Kelley, Insects Limited, Inc.