

Fleas



There are approximately 60 species of fleas in Britain. All are bloodsuckers and temporary parasites of warm- blooded animals, mainly mammals, but a few will feed on birds. Fleas usually require a specific host, but will often feed on other animals if their preferred host is not available. The cat flea is by far the most common of the flea species and readily likes humans.

Appearance

Fleas are flattened from side to side, a useful adaptation that enables them to move easily through the hairs or feathers of the host and they are well known for their jumping capability. Their colour varies from a light brown to almost black, but they are normally a reddish brown. Their body lengths range from 1-8mm and are slightly oval in shape. Most fleas have a pair of small simple eyes, but some are blind, usually those that live underground. The flea, although wing-less, can jump great distances for its size, over 200 times its own body length.

Life Cycle

The life cycle of the flea usually takes place in the resting-place of the host, in the nest, or burrow, or other habitation. Eggs are laid by the female and are white and oval in shape 0.5mm in length. The female may live for several months and lay 20-39 eggs per day.

The egg hatches in about a week, depending on the temperature. The small maggot like larvae search for food, feeding on organic remains that may include undigested blood left by the adult.

The larvae grow and when adult lie in wait for a passing host. The pupa may remain dormant for up to 6 months. This complete cycle takes about a month if conditions are right. Adult fleas feed on blood and their bites can cause intense irritation at the bite site. Of all the fleas the cat flea is responsible for 75% of all flea infestations.

Control Measures

As all development stages of the flea will be found in the habitat of the host, it is essential that this area is thoroughly treated. If there is any pet that might carry fleas then this animal must be treated using an insecticidal shampoo or powder obtainable from your veterinarian. The bedding of the animal must be cleaned regularly. If you use a vacuum then it is advisable to use a small amount of crawling insect powder inside the bag.

Fleas can only breed where the host animal is present. If you remove a cat from the premises, eventually any cat flea infestation will die, out of its inability to breed, although they can still bite humans.

Where fleas are found in a property where there are no pets, then a careful search for old birds nests in the loft or eaves may prove worth while. If there is a heavy infestation it may be necessary to call on the services of a pest control contractor.

Professional help

In addition to those listed on our website Commercial Pest Control Companies are listed in the Yellow Pages and Thompson's Local Directory.

Contact us

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Boston Borough Council

Municipal Buildings

West Street

BOSTON

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