



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation

PESTS

Typical problematic pests in the museum include, but are not limited to, borer, silverfish, carpet beetle, rodents, birds, bats, and possums. Damage to collection items from pests can be small, however it can also result in the complete destruction of material.

DAMAGE CAUSED BY PESTS

Damage caused by pests can be considerable if left unmanaged. Typically, damage by pests is found on collection items made from organic materials (paper, wool, silk, wood).

Damage can include:

- Loss (holes) of material from grazing.
- Staining or discolouration from excrement or other fluids.

TIPS ON HOW TO MANAGE PESTS

Preservation is key – avoid pest damage. By controlling the environment (light, temperature, and humidity) and reducing access to collection material, pest damage can be minimised.

It is recommended that collections have an *INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM)* plan.

- An IPM aims to reduce the occurrence of pests and the damage they cause. Rather than rely on hazardous chemicals to reduce and eliminate pests, an IPM plan focuses on understanding the pests in your environment, their habits, and lifecycles. Infestations may be seasonal. A conservator can provide advice on the development and implementation of an IPM plan.

RESOURCES



reCollections – Caring for Collections Across Australia – Damage and Decay, Heritage Collections Council, available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/b2wi>



Agent of deterioration: Pests, Canadian Conservation Institute Notes – available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/w2wi>



Child, RE 2007, 'Insect Damage as a Function of Climate', Museums Microclimates Conference, The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, pp. 57-60, available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/92wi>



Managing Pests in Paper-based Collections, British Library, available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/k2wi>

Tips include:

- Regular cleaning of storage and exhibition areas reduces dust. (NOTE: cleaning of collection items should be undertaken by a trained professional, typically a conservator).
- Regular monitoring of the display and storage areas, as well as enclosures (boxes, cupboards etc.).
- Use of sticky traps – these can help identify and monitor the types of pests in your environment.
- Keeps doors and windows sealed and closed.
- Seal vents, cracks and other crevices in which insects can hide.
- Protect objects by using storage boxes, cupboards, drawers, and glazed frames.
- Keep tearooms and lunch areas separate from collection storage and display areas.

It is important to correctly identify the pest/s that you have. By understanding the pests in your environment, you will have a better understanding of the materials that they will be attracted to and can target the IPM plan accordingly.

Pests can be identified by excrement, frass or insect shells/skins. If you require assistance in identifying pests/insects, you can contact the local pest control.

PEST OUTBREAK – WHAT TO DO

In the instance that you do find a pest problem:

- Inspect and remove all infested or suspect material.
- Isolate infested material from other collection items and seal in a Ziplock bag – with warning/information label.
- Vacuum-clean the area (NOTE: cleaning of collection items should be undertaken by a trained professional, typically a conservator).
- Freezing infested material is an option. Consult with a conservator before freezing infested items to ensure that the material can be safely treated using this technique.
- Low-oxygen environments is an option when freezing or pesticides is not recommended. Consult with a conservator to discuss this type of treatment.
- Items such as frames or furniture (depending on decorative finish) can be treated with pesticides. Consult with a conservator to determine if the material can be safely treated using this technique.
- Continue to monitor the collection and area after the outbreak.

SUMMARY

Monitoring your environment effectively can be an easy way to protect your collection from pest-related damage. Seek professional advice if collection material is damaged and requires conservation treatment.