

Bird mites: prevention and treatment

Bird mites are naturally found where birds (such as pigeons, starlings, sparrows and poultry) and their nests are located. However, in the first few weeks after birds leave their nests, bird mites may infest homes in search of a blood-meal from humans. Bites from bird mites can cause severe irritation.

What are bird mites?

Bird mites are found in the warmer regions of the world, including Australia.

There are several species of bird mite but the most common species affecting humans is the domestic starling mite, *Ornithonyssus bursa* from the family *Macronyssidae*.



Bird mites are:

- > small (<1mm long) mites with 8 legs.
- > very mobile.
- > semi-transparent in colour until blood has been digested when they appear reddish to blackish.
- > oval in shape with a sparse covering of short hair.

Where are bird mites found?

Bird mites are generally associated with moist or humid conditions and are most active during spring and early summer.

Bird mites are naturally found where birds (such as pigeons, starlings, sparrows and poultry) and their nests are located.

Humans can be exposed to bird mites when young birds leave their nests and the mites are left without a suitable host to feed from.

They may move into living spaces in houses, climbing on walls, ceilings and bedding in search of a blood meal.

How do bird mites survive?

Bird mites:

- > are parasites that feed on the blood of birds.
- > survive and thrive in bird nesting material.
- > increase their numbers rapidly.
- > generally die within 3 weeks if without a blood meal from a bird host.

Get rid of bird mites in 3 steps:

Step 1: Identification

Proper identification of bird mites is very important in determining how to control mite infestations.

Step 2: Finding and removing bird nests

The best approach for controlling an infestation is to locate and remove bird nests.

When removing nests, a mask and gloves should be worn to prevent transfer of mites, and bacterial infections.

Nests may be found:

- > around eaves and in chimneys.
- > in roof spaces.
- > in cavities in walls.
- > in foundations and basements.
- > around porches.
- > on window ledges.

Step 3: Prevention and eradication

Prevent birds from occupying spaces in houses by repairing broken tiles and blocking openings in eaves or roof cavities.

To eradicate bird mites, treat the area with an approved insecticide such as a surface spray or insecticide powder.



A registered pest controller may be required if the nesting material is inaccessible, large areas are involved or if self treatment efforts fail or prove ineffective.

How do bird mites affect humans?

Bird mites do not live on humans but can affect humans by nuisance biting. They can only complete their life cycle on a bird host. Therefore, infestations are generally self-limiting if birds and nesting have been eradicated.

Bites from bird mites:

- > may cause severe irritation including itching, swelling and raised reddish spots on the skin caused by mites injecting saliva when feeding.
- > cause discomfort.
- > may result in secondary infections from scratching.
- > are not associated with transmission of any infectious disease.
- > are often difficult to diagnose and can be mistaken for the bites of other insects.

The sensation of crawling bird mites on the skin will irritate some people.

Bird mites do not:

- > prefer to bite any particular part of the body.
- > burrow into or live under the skin.

How can you avoid bird mite bites?

The best way to avoid bird mite bites is to apply an insect repellent containing N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide (DEET).

An anti-itch cream or lotion may reduce irritation associated with bites.

Further information

If you believe you have a bird mite infestation at home:

Contact:

- > an environmental health officer at your local council

Visit:

- > [Bird mites | SA Health](#)

Read:

- > [enHealth guidance – Arthropod pests of public health significance in Australia | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

For more information

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