

Silverfish and Firebrats in the Home

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Silverfish (Fig. 1) and firebrats (Fig. 2) are wingless, scaly, fast-moving insects about ½ inch long, with two long antennae on the head and three long bristles on the tail. Silverfish are silver-gray and prefer cool damp areas. Firebrats are mottled tan and inhabit very warm areas, such as around furnaces and hot water pipes. These insects are most active at night and may be found anywhere in the house. They feed on starchy materials, such as glue, sizing, paste, fabric finish, book bindings, paper, and starched materials including synthetic fabrics containing sizing (even rayon!). Their feeding can cause serious damage. Silverfish and firebrats may also feed on vegetables, cereals, flour, and more.

Management

Avoid accumulating papers, books, and lumber. Keep storage and other areas clean. Trap these insects by using a small jar with smooth vertical walls. Place something rough on the outer walls so the insects can crawl up and fall into the jar. They cannot climb out. Traps must be placed in paths commonly used by the insects, such as in corners and next to walls. Bait is not needed, but a small layer of flour enhances the trap's effectiveness.

If insecticides are needed, household aerosol formulations with nuisance pests listed on label may be used. Spray areas where insects are seen, usually around closets, shelves, warm pipes, and under sinks. Carefully follow all label directions and precautions.



Fig. 1. Silverfish. Author unknown.



Fig. 2. Firebrat. Author unknown.