

EARWIGS

APPEARANCE

Adult earwigs are dark reddish brown in colour, around 16mm long with a reddish head and pale yellow-brown legs and a pair of pincers at the end of the abdomen which are used for attack or defence and to assist in folding the wings.

The common earwig (*Forficula auricularia*) although possessing wings, rarely flies.

LIFE CYCLE

A male mates with only one female and after mating they hibernate in underground cells in the base of tree stumps. In early spring the female lays a batch of around 50 white eggs in the cell and when the male leaves the cell, she remains to guard the eggs.

The eggs hatch into tiny adults called nymphs which are looked after by the mother until they reach maturity in June or July. The females may have more than one brood in a season, after which they die.

FEEDING HABITS

Earwigs are active at night and hide during the day in cracks and crevices. They feed on a variety of garden plants making small

irregular holes in the leaves but may often be found inside houses during the day in any part of the premises providing shelter.

SIGNS OF INFESTATION

Earwigs may be seen indoors in cellars, hiding in laundry, inside wardrobes and even roof spaces.

Damage in gardens is often noticed by skeletonised plant leaves similar to slug damage but with an absence of slime. Occasionally a nest of young earwigs squirming and writhing in a mass may be found in the garden.

CONTROL

Earwigs are predominantly garden pests and have no public health significance, causing a nuisance only when entering houses. Our pest control officers can therefore only offer advice on self-help measures of control.

The first means of control is to remove unessential plant debris, mulch and boards from around buildings and to remedy defective downspouts which might provide moist areas attractive to nesting females. An open zone around houses of gravel, sand or concrete underlined with plastic will be exposed to sunlight and wind and dry out thereby providing a disagreeable environment for earwigs.

Proprietary insecticidal sprays or dusts can be applied indoors where the insects are seen and outside, the base of external walls can be sprayed with a residual insecticide for effective longer term control.

