

CLUSTER FLIES

APPEARANCE

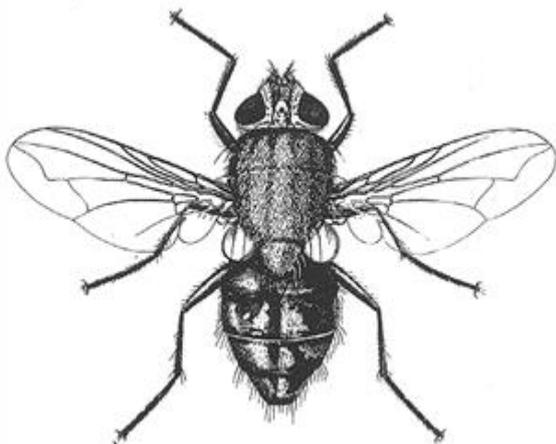
There are three main species of fly collectively known as cluster flies. They are *Musca autumnalis*, a small fly of about the same size and colour as the house fly, *Pollenia rudis*, a larger fly dull brown/grey in colour, and lastly *Dasyhora caynella* which is about house fly size and shiny green/blue in colour.

LIFE CYCLE

Cluster flies, particularly *Pollentia rudis* are very common occurring throughout Great Britain. The adult flies after hibernation during the winter months, lay their eggs in the earth or in animal dung. Permanent areas of grassland are favourite sites e.g. permanent grazed pasture or parkland as soil cultivation such as ploughing disrupts the flies breeding cycle. The eggs remain in the earth and hatch when soil temperature increases in the spring. The larval stage is parasitic, entering earthworms and feeding upon them until emerging as an adult fly.

FEEDING HABITS

Cluster flies are not damaging to property when they enter buildings in the autumn



purely to hibernate over the cold winter months. As mentioned above they feed on decaying vegetation and earthworms. Cluster flies are not to be associated with dead animal bodies, faeces and the resulting maggots. Fibre glass insulation material in lofts can look unsightly if covered with the bodies of flies that have not hibernated successfully.

SIGNS OF INFESTATION

Cluster flies migrate from outdoors into the lofts of houses and farm buildings during the winter months. Obvious sign of an infestation is a roof space containing a large quantity of lethargic flies and a quantity of dead flies. Unless your loft is used for storage purposes or is accessed regularly the flies will hibernate successfully leaving in early spring dependant on the weather. If your loft is home to a hibernating colony of flies, first floor lighting diffusers or sunken spot light lenses can become full of dead or dying flies.

This often occurs in houses where the loft area has been converted into a living room. In most buildings built after 1950 the external roof covering has an under felt layer. Cluster flies can successfully hibernate undetected between these two layers.

Often cluster flies can be seen basking on sunny grassland or resting on south facing walls of buildings. Cluster flies, like birds return to roof spaces previously occupied so re-infestation is inevitable.

CONTROL

If your property is annually infested with cluster flies and a significant nuisance is caused, then the answer might be in late August or early September (before the first flies have migrated into your loft), to place several "Citronella" type insect deterrents containing a wick which slowly emits a fragrance into the loft. This creates an unpleasant environment for the scout flies that arrive persuading them to possibly choose another more suitable location. If a major infestation is allowed to occur, then engaging the services of a professional pest controller might be necessary.