

Identification & Advisory Service

Classification

Class	Insecta
Order	Coleoptera
Family	Anobiidae

Death watch beetle

Xestobium rufovillosum

Other names: Knock beetle, wormwood

Xestobium rufovillosum commonly known as the death watch beetle is a wood boring beetle within the family Anobiidae. This species is well known for being a pest species as the larvae feed on deadwood in its natural habitat and when introduced to a home environment they feed on wooden items.

Identification

There are three species in the genus *Xestobium* in central Europe with the death watch beetle being the one reprehensive species in England. The beetle ranges from 5 – 9mm in length. They have cylindrical bodies and head which is characteristic of a wood boring species. The pronotum usually covers the head when viewed from above the beetle.



(1) Dorsal side



(2) Lateral side



(3) Ventral side



(4) Adult *Xestobium rufovillosum* in habitat

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Possible confusion

Common furniture beetle (*Anobium punctatum*) can be confused for the death watch beetle. Distinctive character that can be used to differ the two species is that the furniture beetle has longitudinal rows of pits on the elytra, whereas the death watch beetle lacks this characteristic. Death watch beetles also produce the characteristic tapping and ticking sound which the furniture beetle does not.

Distribution and habitat

The death watch beetle is common and widespread in the south of England and can be found in wood, both indoors and in deadwood of trees. It occurs as a pest of furniture and wood indoors.

Life cycle

During spring the adults can be commonly found in wood and deadwood. Females lay their eggs into small holes in wood or a trees. The larvae then develop inside the wood, during the larval stage they tunnel in the wood feeding until they begin to pupate in a pupation chamber. After pupation the adult beetle tunnels out of the wood where they leave characteristic exit holes which can be useful in determining presence of this species. The length of time to complete a life cycle in this species varies, some individuals have been reported to take over 4-5 years, whereas others have completed their life cycle in one year.

Signs of an infestation

Holes in wood are the most likely piece of evidence to suggest an infestation, the holes and tunnels are circular and around 3mm in diameter. The larvae of the death watch beetle produce small bun-like pellets of faeces which are also very distinctive to this species.

Prevention and Control

Avoid the introduction of decayed or damaged wood into the home, for smaller items with an infestation freezing can be productive in controlling an outbreak.

To find out more:

Gallery

<http://coleopterist.org.uk/gallery.htm>

Wikipedia page on death watch beetle

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deathwatch_beetle

Death watch beetle Fact file

<http://www.arkive.org/death-watch-beetle/xestobium-rufovillosum/>

Death watch beetle as museum pests

<http://museumpests.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Deathwatch-Beetle.pdf>