Ants

Appearance and behaviour

- There are several thousand varieties of ant of which, there are approximately 47 British species. The most common types are **black ants** (lasius niger) and **red ants** (myrmica rubra or myrmica ruginodis).
- Most ants reproduce during nuptial flights, so **winged ants** are the same insects, just in their breeding state. The ants will fly up into the air, become fertilised, then return to earth. The females will chew their wings off and make new nests but the males will die.
- Ants leave pheromone scent trails which other ants are able to follow to a food source, so if you have a spillage in your house or garden that is attractive to ants, you may soon find large numbers of them around it!
- The size of an ant colony can vary from a hundred individuals, up to a few thousand. A single queen lays all of the eggs and when she dies, the colony dies. If left untreated, an ant colony can survived for many years.

Control

The Council does not offer a service for the treatment of ants.

The best method of eradicating them is:

- Use an insecticidal powder. These powders are available in hardware stores, garden centres and supermarkets. Follow the instructions on the packaging to ensure proper use of the product.
- Crawling insect sprays are also very effective and will kill any ants that are sprayed directly.
- Good housekeeping is essential. Make sure kitchen surfaces and floor areas are kept clean and are wiped regularly. Clean up any spillages immediately so that ants are not attracted.

A red ant variety which is best treated professionally is the **pharoah ant** (monomorium pharonis). They live indoors and breed throughout the year. The application of an insecticidal powder or spray may cause the ants to 'bud', where the colony divides and each separate part starts a new colony. If red ants are present it is best to seek advice from a professional pest controller, unless there are red ants with wings present, in which case it is likely to be one of the other red ant species, and they can be treated with powder.

Bees

Bees store food so they can survive all year round. Each bee colony has a single queen and up to 20,000 workers.

Bees are slightly larger than wasps and have a "hairy" look to their legs and body, which is quite bulbous.

Workers concentrate on collecting food and they are essential pollinators.

Spotting a nest

Bee nests are by necessity large and can usually be easily spotted. They are most often in cavities and hollows.

Bumble bee colonies can be found in compost heaps, in banks under hedges, beneath garden decking etc.

Bee stings

- Stings can be painful, and may cause serious adverse reaction in a small proportion of the public. However, bees are likely to attack only if they or their hives are threatened.
- The sting of a bee is different from a wasp sting as the bee leaves the stinger, with the venom sac attached, sticking in the victim.
- Remove the stinger as soon as possible by scraping it horizontally. Do not pull it out with the fingers, as this will squeeze the venom out of the sac and into the body.
- Apply a cool compresses on the sting.
- Bee stings should be bathed in a solution of **bicarbonate of soda**.
- If the sting is in the mouth, sucking an ice cube will ease discomfort, but medical aid should be sought. The same applies for multiple stings.
- As some people are allergic to stings **medical help should be sought immediately** at the first sign of excessive swelling or difficulty in breathing.

Bees swarms

These are common in May and June, and bees usually remain in the same place for a maximum of two days before moving on to take up permanent residence.

When settled temporarily i.e. hanging from a branch, a beekeeper may be willing to come out and capture them. Most swarms are docile but it is advisable to keep children and pets well away.

Further advice can be obtained from the British Beekeepers Association

Nuisance

There are specialist masonry or miner bees which may make their home in the soft mortar between the brickwork of your house.

Guarding against bees

Make your home unattractive to bees by limiting the places they can form a new hive. Any enclosed spaces such as cavity walls can become bee hives if access is available through cracks.

In conclusion...

Bees are not considered pests and can bring new life to the flowering plants in their area. If you have any special worries, for example an allergy to bee stings or concern for your family, a pest control contractor or beekeeper can give advice about control methods.

Local Beekeepers

Further advice and assistance on honey bees may be obtained from:

Mr J Hamer Blackhorse Apiaries 01483 475259

Alternatively, contact details for other local members of the Beekeepers Association are available from their website, or you may choose to contact a Pest Control Contractor.

Biscuit Beetles

Appearance and behaviour

- The biscuit beetle (stegobium peniceum), also known as the drugstore beetle or bread beetle, is 2-3mm long and is mid to dark-matt brown in colour.
- It is found in shops and domestic larders infesting a wide variety of foodstuffs such as flour, bread, breakfast cereals and other cereal products.
- The female biscuit beetle lays its eggs either in foodstuffs or the surrounding areas. Around two weeks later the eggs will hatch and tiny larvae will emerge and infest foodstuff in the area, often penetrating packaging.
- The larvae will live inside the packets of foodstuff for two to five months where they will continue to grow and moult. Once they have reached a full grown length of 5mm they find movement difficult and will construct a cocoon around themselves.
- The pupal stage lasts two to three weeks then the adults may remain in the cocoon for a further two weeks before emerging. On emerging the adults disperse and live without feeding for up to eight weeks. Mating takes place soon after the adult has emerged and the female will then lay her eggs before she dies.

Significance

The biscuit beetle causes serious problems for the food industry due to its widespread occurrence and its ability to breach most forms of food packaging.

How to get rid of them

The Council does not offer a service for the treatment of biscuit beetles.

- The source of the infestation should be traced and where possible eliminated.
- Secondary sources of infestation such as birds nests and food residues should be removed as the biscuit beetle can use these in which to breed and re-infest new foodstuff.
- To treat with insecticide, all food must be removed from the storage area and examined for contamination by larvae / insects.
- Any contaminated food should be placed in a sealed plastic bag and disposed of.
- A suitable insecticide (one for crawling insects) should be applied to the area and all cracks and crevices.
- The area should be left for approximately 24 hours before thorough cleansing.
- All remaining foodstuffs can then be replaced.

Prevention

- Check cupboards regularly and use contents before their 'use by' dates.
- Store vulnerable foodstuffs like flour in washable, covered containers.
- Check food packaging before purchase to ensure it is undamaged.
- Check the food on first opening, to ensure it is not infested.

Pesticides are available from hardware stores, make sure you read and follow the instructions before use.

Carpet beetles

Appearance and behaviour

- Carpet beetles are a fairly common pest, they occur naturally outdoors.
- There are several species of carpet beetle. The most common types are the black 'fur beetle' (attagenus pelio) which has a single white spot on each wing case and the 'varied carpet beetle' (anthrenus verbasci). The fur beetle is oblong shaped and 4½ to 6mm long, the varied carpet beetle is more oval in shape resembling a small mottled brown, grey and cream ladybird.

- Larvae of carpet beetles are fairly distinctive and are known as 'woolly bears'. They are quite hairy and tan in colour. There may be tail bristles as well.
- An adult female will produce up to one hundred creamy white eggs and deposit them in cracks and crevices. Within four weeks the eggs hatch and the emergent woolly bears embark on a continuous feeding binge and moult several times before pupating; the length of the larval life is normally 60-70 days but this may increase or decrease depending on temperature, humidity and diet.
- They have a capacity to hibernate in cold conditions and to remerge in spring.
- The adult lives for up six weeks during which time it will fly off in search of pollen and nectar and for egg laying sites.

Significance

The carpet beetle is a major textile pest of the home where central heating provides a welcome uniform heating and fitted carpets provide harbourage for undisturbed breeding.

Carpet beetles neither carry germs nor do they spread disease hence their presence does not constitute a risk to health. However, the activities of the woolly bears will cause damage and indeed ruin carpets, animal furs and leathers.

Control

- It is important to first trace the source of the infestation. Check the roofspace for old birds' nests and wool based lagging or other materials, examine the cracks between floorboards around the edges of rooms and under skirting boards for accumulations of debris and check sheepskin rugs and all animal fur/skin clothing.
- Infested nests and inexpensive materials should be removed and burned and the areas from which they have been removed thoroughly vacuumed using a nozzle head and paying particular attention to cracks and crevices.
- The above should be complemented by treating using a residual (crawling insect) insecticide to ensure that all larvae have been killed.

Pesticides are available from hardware stores, make sure you read and follow the instructions before use.

Moths

There are three commonly found types of moth that can do a great deal of damage to clothes, carpets and soft furnishings. The damage is caused by the feeding of the larvae and not the adult moths.

Common Clothes Moth (Tineola bisselliella)

This moth is a shining golden colour, between 6-8mm long. Although these moths are chiefly seen in the early summer and autumn they may be found at almost any time of year. Larvae are a creamy white colour with a brown head, up to ½ inch long and spin thread, constructing silken tunnels.

Case Bearing Clothes Moth (Tinea pellionella)

This moth has larvae that spin a distinctive silken case in which it lives. The head and foreparts of the larvae protrude as it moves about, dragging the case with it.

The adults vary in length from about 4-12 mm. The fore wings are dusty brown with three blackish spots. The moths may be found most commonly from June to October.

The Large Pale Clothes Moth (Tinea pallescentella)

The adults vary in size but are normally 8-12 mm and have greyish brown wings with dark marks at either end. The adults may be found from June to October.

Nuisance

Clothes Moths neither carry germs nor do they spread disease hence their presence does not constitute a risk to health. However, the activities of the larvae will cause damage and indeed ruin carpets, animal furs and leathers.

Control

The Council does not offer a service for the treatment of moths.

Moths are often indicative of poor hygiene conditions. The area should be thoroughly cleaned and vacuumed to remove any eggs, larvae and pupae. Residual sprays may be applied to the infested areas.

Individual adult moths may be knocked down with a flying insect spray.

Care should be taken when using any insecticide spray, the advice and directions for use should be carefully followed.

For heavy infestations you may require the services of a pest control contractor.

Prevention

In order to prevent infestations in confined spaces, such as drawers, where woollens etc. are stored the use of approved moth proofers or slow releasing insect repellents should be considered.

Thorough cleaning, dusting and airing of clothes can also help avoid infestations.

Pigeons

Woking Borough Council does not deal with proofing properties, other than its own, to discourage pigeons. If you have a problem, we recommend you contact a local pest control company, who should be a member of the British Pest Control Association.

The Council has no policy to control or cull birds within the area, as such actions can only have a short-term impact.

We will, however, act to discourage situations where pigeons become a statutory nuisance, and offer advice as necessary.

Food is the most important factor determining the size of any pigeon population, and the best known, long-term solution to pigeon problems is to restrict its availability.

Origins of feral pigeons

- Feral pigeons are descended from wild rock doves, their populations have increased, especially in urban areas, in recent years. These birds interbreed with escapees from dovecotes and lost racing pigeons.

- Colours and marking vary considerably from blue-grey, through blues, reds, mottled patterns and charcoal to almost pure white.
- Descended from a bird that thrives in a cliff environment, feral pigeons form large flocks that roost on building and ledges and under bridges. They can often be found in loft spaces and empty building anywhere that offers a small amount of shelter.
- Their preferred diet is grain and seed, but they will scavenge food, take food from bird tables and eat household scraps / discarded takeaway foods.
- Feral pigeons can breed all year round if food is in good supply raising between three and six broods of two 'squabs' a year.
- Nests are constructed of twigs but can also contain rubbish such as pieces of plastic.

Pigeon problems

- **Damage** - pigeon droppings are not only unsightly but are acidic and can cause damage to buildings and machinery. Nesting material, droppings and feathers can block gutters and air vents.
- **Public health** - pigeons carry a range of diseases, some of which may be transmitted to humans if droppings contaminate food stuffs. For this reason their presence cannot be tolerated in and around food premises. They also carry mites which can cause skin disease and dust from their feathers can cause respiratory problems.
- **Accidents** - pigeon dropping and food left down for pigeons can cause walkways to become slippery and dangerous. Startled flocks can take flight suddenly, causing hazards to motorists and pedestrians.
- **Other birds** - large numbers of pigeons can drive smaller birds away from feeding areas . The pigeons also spread disease to other birds, reducing their numbers.

Feeding pigeons

- Pigeons are wild birds capable of finding their own food. Waste food does not contain the essential vitamins the birds require causing ill health and deformity.

- Feeding pigeons attracts them to areas that are not natural to them and exposes them to injury. They are especially vulnerable to attack by cats when encouraged to feeding on the ground.
- Feeding results in all year breeding that causes overcrowding. The birds become stressed causing disease and parasites to spread quickly within the flock.
- Waste food left down for pigeons attracts foxes, rats and mice.
- Pigeons control their numbers very effectively and a reduction in the food supply does not mean the birds will die of starvation, it just means they will breed less often or even not at all.

There will always be pigeons in Woking, however, if feeding is reduced, their numbers will decline resulting in a smaller healthier flock with less need for drastic control measures.
PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE PIGEONS

What the law says about pigeons

- Most birds and their nests are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- The Act allows for the control of certain birds, including feral pigeons, by authorised persons using specified methods to prevent serious damage to agriculture, to preserve public health / air safety, or to conserve other wild birds.
- The use of spring traps, poisons, certain types of nets, gassing and sticky substances that may entangle a bird are illegal. Approved methods include trapping or drugging followed by humane destruction and shooting.
- It is an offence under the Criminal Damage Act 1971 to intentionally kill a racing pigeon.

Proofing of buildings

There are several methods of discouraging pigeons from roosting on your premises. However, this is a specialist area of work and we recommend you contact a local pest control company, who should be a member of the British Pest Control Association, for further advice and information.

Psocids

Appearance and behaviour

- Psocids (Psocoptera sp.), or booklice as they're sometimes known, are minute (1-2mm long) grey or brown insects often found on the packaging of dry goods such as flour, milk powder, sugar or semolina and also microscopic moulds that develop in humid conditions.
- They are common insects which do not generally cause any damage or destruction, nor spread disease, but people don't like discovering live creatures in their foodstuffs.
- Pscocids are known to live for approximately six months and during that time a female can lay 200 eggs. Development from egg to adult takes abour one month.
- These tiny insects dislike light or disturbance and prefer dark, warm, humid places, though they can tolerate dry conditions for some days.
- Infestations are not caused by poor hygiene and are just as common in the newest and cleanest of homes as they are in older properties.

Control

The Council does not offer a service for the treatment of psocids.

If you find psocids in your kitchen, don't use an insecticide as you risk contaminating your food.

The best method of eradicating them is to:

- Remove and dispose of all affected food.
- Clean the cupboard with a dry cloth, or vacuum it, and empty contents into a dustbin kept outside.
- Make sure the storage area is completely dry before restocking. This may be achieved by using a warm air blower such as a hair dryer.
- Keep the house free from condensation and, in particular, the kitchen. If you notice condensation, particularly during cooking, etc. open the window. Keep food cupboards well ventilated and dry.
- Check cupboards regularly and use contents before their 'use by' dates.
- Store vulnerable foodstuffs like flour in washable, covered containers.
- Check food packaging before purchase to ensure it is undamaged.
- Check the food on first opening, to ensure it is not infested.
- Safeguard against the warm, moist and dark conditions that psocids like.

Snakes

Snakes are protected by law

All snakes in the UK are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: Schedule 5 and it is an offence to kill, injure or take a native snake.

Which snake is it?

There are three native species (grass snake, adder and smooth snake) and one legless lizard (slow-worm), which may be confused for a snake. All species are currently in decline mainly due to habitat loss. Snakes are naturally secretive creatures and because of their behaviour they are often feared by humans.

Grass snake (Natrix natrix)

This is the largest snake in the UK, growing to about 150 cm but more commonly up to around 75 cm (2.5 ft). It is normally a shade of green with short black vertical bars and/or spots running along its sides and sometimes along the back. There is a yellow or white coloured collar behind the head bordered to the rear with black markings.

Often found near water such as rivers, canals, ponds, as well as open grassland, open woodland and quite often gardens that adjoin these habitats. Compost heaps in gardens may be used as egg-laying sites, if so the young will appear in late August and September.

Grass snakes may visit your garden pond because they mainly feed on amphibians and fish but they are harmless to humans.

Adder (Vipera berus)

Adders typically grow to around 55 cm (2 ft) and have a distinctive zigzag pattern running along the length of their back. Female snakes are usually brown with dark brown markings and male snakes are normally grey or buff with black markings.

They are mainly found on rough grassland and heathland. Adders do not lay eggs or make nests. They give birth in late summer or early autumn.

They are the only venomous snake in the UK, but because the venom is designed to kill small animals like voles it is not particularly potent. You are more likely to be harmed by bees or horses. However, if you are bitten by an adder it is advisable to seek medical assistance immediately.

Smooth snake (Coronella austriaca)

Smooth snakes are slender and normally grow to around 55 cm (2 ft). They are grey or grey-brown with darker markings along their back and usually a 'butterfly' shape on the top of their head.

They are very rare in the UK but can be found in heathland habitats in Surrey. It would be very unusual to find a smooth snake in your garden. They are very secretive and would normally be found underneath objects.

Slow-worm (Anguis fragilis)

The slow-worm is in fact a lizard, but it has no legs and it is often mistaken for a snake. They are smaller than our native snakes, usually growing to about 40 cm (16 inches). The scales are small and smooth, giving slow-worms a shiny or polished appearance. Female and juvenile snakes tend to have a golden-brown background with a thin black line running along their back. Adult males tend to have a duller brown/grey background and usually lack the darker stripe.

Slow-worms are fairly widespread in the UK and are often found in grassland and heathland. They can be quite common in some urban/suburban areas and are most likely to be found in gardens and allotments.

They feed largely on slugs and are therefore useful visitors to our gardens. You will find them mainly underneath objects such as paving slabs or in compost heaps.

Exotic species

Non-native snake species, either accidentally or escaped pets, may be encountered. These can be a variety of colours and sizes and common example is a corn snake. If you see a snake that you cannot identify from the list provided please contact the RSPCA for assistance on 0870 33 35 999.

If you see a snake...

- Keep calm!
- Take a good look, but don't touch, catch or trap the snake.
- Try to identify the snake using the pictures and information provided.
- Snakes are timid and usually flee from people and pets.

- Grass snakes and slow-worms, which are harmless, often visit gardens.
- Adders, which are venomous but normally pose little threat, rarely occur in gardens.
- Smooth snakes are very rare and only a few thousand individuals are left in the wild so it is unlikely that you will see one in your garden.
- It is illegal to kill or injure native snakes.

Useful contacts

RSPCA

Cruelty Line 0870 55 55 999
To report an injured or distressed snake.

Advice Line 0870 33 35 999
For general advice and assistance.

FROGlife 01733 558960
Froglife is a national wildlife charity concerned with the protection and conservation of amphibians and reptiles in the UK. There are a number of fact sheets available online and an identification poster.

The Herpetological Conservation Trust 01202 391319
Report any sightings of snakes to the trust and provide as much detail as possible such as: species, location, date, weather conditions, and habitat type.

Natural England 01483 452050 - Surrey office
Information and advice about reptiles in your garden is available online and can be downloaded for free.

Surrey Wildlife Trust 01483 795440

Information regarding protected species and foxes

The presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat.

Bats

Bats and their roosts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Bats roost on a seasonal basis and therefore, are protected whether bats are in occupation or not.

Please note, you must not:

- deliberately capture (or take), injure or kill a bat
- intentionally or recklessly disturb a group of bats, where the disturbance is likely to (a) impair their ability to survive, breed, rear their young, hibernate or migrate, or (b) to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species.
- damage or destroy the breeding or resting place (roost) of a bat
- possess a bat (alive or dead) or any part of a bat
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost
- sell (or offer to sell) or exchange (alive or dead) bats.

When carrying out works to properties where bats nest, a special licence must be sought from Natural England. For more information, please visit:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bats-protection-surveys-and-licences

http://www.bats.org.uk/

Badgers

Badgers are a protected species. In addition to The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 and The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994, badgers are also covered by the provisions of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992

Foxes

Foxes have successfully adapted to towns and cities, taking full advantage of the opportunities that an urban area can present. Foxes are opportunists, they tend to scavenge and will eat practically anything. Their diet includes worms, beetles, berries, carrion, rodents, rabbits and birds. They also find food in rubbish bags, compost heaps and around bird tables given the opportunity to do so.

Foxes tend to live in small family groups, especially during the breeding season (December to January). A family will consist of a male fox (dog) and a female (vixen) producing one litter of approximately four cubs each year. Only pairs with an established territory will breed, so fox numbers are naturally limited by both availability of food and the amount of space in the territory.

Foxes and people

Fox attacks on humans are extremely rare and are usually the result of a fox being cornered. Foxes are most active at night and you are most likely to encounter them between dawn and dusk. It is very rare for foxes to venture indoors, but inexperienced juveniles will sometimes come in if they see an open door or a bowl of pet food - an easy meal.

If you are concerned because you know that foxes are in your area, please consider these simple precautions.

- Do not leave windows and doors open, making it easy for foxes to enter properties and don't leave babies in prams unattended.
- Do not encourage foxes into your garden by feeding them.
- Deter foxes from entering your garden and reduce the availability/attractiveness of den sites.

Foxes that have been encouraged to enter gardens for feeding could potentially enter properties. It is advisable not to leave food out for foxes. In addition, food scraps left out on the ground for early evening fox feeding will also provide an easy meal for rats, which carry diseases that are transmittable to humans. These include:

- Weil’s disease
- Salmonella
- Tuberculosis
- Cryptosporidiosis

- E.Coli
- Foot and mouth disease.

If a fox is cornered, it may attempt to bite in self-defence. So, if you find a fox trapped in an outbuilding or similar situation, do not approach it or try to pick it up. Leave it an escape route and it will move away as soon as it feels safe enough to do so.

Deterring foxes

Culling foxes is expensive and not effective. Foxes are territorial, as soon as a fox is killed, other foxes in the surrounding area take up residence in the newly available territory. The only way to successfully control the number of foxes in urban areas is limit the availability of food sources and deter them from setting up home in your garden.

Bristol University have produced an informative website with information about nuisance problems caused by both urban and rural foxes.

Further advice and assistance may be obtained from a pest control contractor or one of the following groups.

Urban Fox Deterrence Advice Line
Phone: 01892 826 222

Humane Urban Wildlife Deterrence
Phone: 0208 3167852

The National Fox Welfare Society

Phone: 01933 397324