

The fleet-footed silverfish, *Lepisma saccharina*, is an insect that often attracts attention and can cause many of us concern. It is also one of the most common insects found indoors.

The silverfish - a nocturnal waste collector

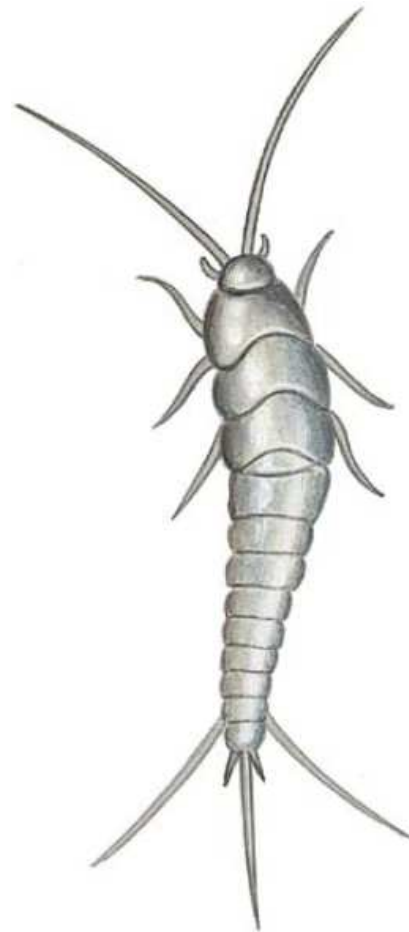
THE SILVERFISH BELONGS TO the order *Zygentoma* and has existed for 300 million years. It is found all over the world and there are about 370 different species, two of them in Sweden - the silverfish and the firebrat.

ALL MEMBERS OF THE ZYGENTOMA ORDER have carrot/fish-shaped bodies and also go by the name “bristletails” because of their three characteristic caudal filaments. Silverfish is a generic term for species in this group whose bodies are covered in silvery scales. The name “silverfish” comes from their body colour and probably their fluid movement which makes them look like they are “swimming”. Other names are fishmoths, carpet sharks, paramites and firebrats. The name “firebrat” suits them as they are often found in furnace rooms, steam pipe tunnels and water heater rooms. They are also averse to light and only come out of their hiding-places when it is dark.

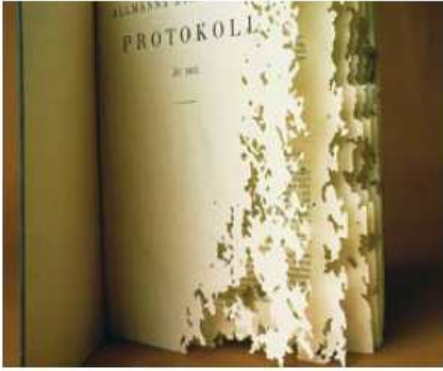
THE SILVERFISH CAN OFTEN BE SEEN AROUND DRAINS in bathtubs and sinks or around floor grates, which leads many to believe that the insect comes into the home via wastewater in sewage pipes. This is a misconception, however. The silverfish does not travel in water but can crawl along the outside of plumbing pipes. It finds its food in the deposits that form under air extraction vents and drains.

THEY CAN BE FOUND ALMOST EVERYWHERE indoors - in the living-room, bedroom, bathroom, loft, cellar and garage. During daylight hours, they stay hidden in cracks, chinks and other cavities. It thrives in warm, damp conditions. The species prefers temperatures of about +21-29°C and a relative humidity of 70-100%.

THE OCCURRENCE OF SILVERFISH can be a sign of rising damp as it is so fond of high humidity. One or two silverfish, especially in the bathroom and kitchen, is nothing unusual. It's time to take action, however, if they start to appear in other parts of the home, such as in the living-room.



Silverfish (*Lepisma saccharina*)



Visible signs of silverfish damage



Silverfish are commonly found in and around floor drains



A close-up of the silverfish

SILVERFISH ARE OMNIVORES and live off waste deposits that collect in and around floor drains and waste pipes. Their favourite food is items containing starch; glue, book bindings, sugar, hair and dandruff. It can sometimes cause damage to old book-covers, paper and starched textiles. But even cotton, silk or dead insects are suitable food for them. The silverfish can even eat its own shed skin. It can also go without food for several months.

THE SILVERFISH OFTEN COMES into our homes via goods and products we buy. It normally doesn't cause any damage and can indeed be seen as a nocturnal waste collector.

What does a silverfish look like?

- The species never develops fully and a young silverfish resembles an adult. As they grow, they shed their skin.
- A fully grown adult silverfish lives for 2-4 years.
- Their bodies are 10-15 mm long not counting their bristle/tail-like appendage.
- They are carrot/fish-shaped, tapering from the head towards the posterior and normally covered in scales.

What can we do to combat silverfish?

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS on how to keep silverfish out of your home:

- Keep the place dry, this is the most effective way of keeping silverfish out of your home.
- Keeping your home clean and tidy is the key. Regular cleaning reduces the insect's source of food.
- Seal cracks and chinks to discourage the silverfish.
- Don't leave books, paper or clothes lying about on the floor.

Visit www.anticimex.se for more information.