

## Flea

**Scientific Name:** *Ctenocephalides felis* (Bouche)

**Order:** Siphonaptera



**Cat flea,**  
*Ctenocephalides felis* (Bouche)  
(Siphonaptera: Pulicidae),  
adult.  
Photo by R. Meola.

**Description:** Adults are small (1/8 inch), dark brown, wingless insects with a flattened body and hind legs modified for jumping. Larvae are whitish, legless and worm-like and grow to almost 1/4 inch. Eggs are white and round.

There are a number of other flea species which occur in Texas, including the **dog flea**, *Ctenocephalides canis* (Curtis), and the **oriental rat flea**, *Xenopsylla cheopis* (Rothschild). One unusual flea, the **sticktight flea**, *Echidophaga gallinacea* (Westwood), is found in south Texas that burrows into the skin of its hosts, particularly birds.

**Life Cycle:** Mated female fleas lay eggs after consuming host blood. Eggs fall to the ground in the near vicinity where hosts spend time and rest. Whitish larvae hatch from eggs in 2 to 3 weeks. Larvae develop over 9 to 15 days under optimum conditions, but depending on the temperature may take up to 200 days. Fully developed larvae spin cocoons of silk that becomes encrusted with soil particles and debris, making them hard to detect. The pupal stage lasts from 7 days to a year before adults emerge. Under optimum temperature and humidity conditions development can be completed in 30 to 75 days.

**Habitat and Food Source(s):** Adult mouth parts are modified for piercing and sucking blood, larvae have chewing mouthparts. Adults can bite repeatedly. Adult fleas move around freely on the host and from host to host. Although cat fleas prefer cats as hosts, they are capable of surviving on dogs and other wild or domestic animals. Adults suck blood for survival, egg development, and partially digested blood expelled as feces serve as food for larvae. Newly emerged, unfed adults can survive for weeks off of the host.

Eggs can be collected by sweeping the ground around an infested animal. These eggs and the debris (fecal material - dried blood) collected with it can be kept in a jar to allow larvae to develop. Adult specimens can be obtained from infested hosts using a fine tined comb. Traps with a light as an attractant above a pan of water or sticky card are marketed to control fleas.

**Pest Status:** Adults (fleas) bite pets and humans; bites are irritating and can potentially transmit diseases; consumption of fleas can also result in the transmission of tapeworms; constant scratching of itchy flea bites can result in other skin problems and allergic reactions.

For additional information, contact your local Texas Cooperative Extension agent or search for other state Extension offices.

Literature: Ebeling 1978; Patrick & Hamman 1980.