



# Unwelcome bedmate

## The patient

Last fall, Bruce and his girlfriend took advantage of a year-end special rate and spent a week in the Caribbean. The hotel was rated as a 4-star property and they had no complaints regarding their stay, however, the day following their return to Ontario, Bruce woke up with severe itching on one of his legs. He quickly realized that running along the length of his foreleg were a series of wheals (elevated swelling of the skin). Each had a red spot in the centre with a diffuse inflamed area around the bite. Because of the severe itching, he attended the local Urgent Care Unit at one of the local hospitals.

## The diagnosis

Although the actual presence of a bed bug could not be confirmed, on the basis of the appearance of the bites, as well as their typical pattern of feeding, the diagnosis was made.

The fact that Bruce had just returned from a tropical country did involve a careful questioning about exposure to other parasites, but other parasites, such as the more serious Jigger Flea (*Tunga penetrans*), was quickly eliminated. At that stage in the discussion, Bruce did recall joking to his girlfriend about the book at the hotel that invited guests to comment on their stay. Most guests had nothing but good things to say but a few did note the unfortunate presence of bed bugs in their room!

Bruce was discharged with a prescription for a corticosteroid cream; this is an anti-inflammatory agent to be applied

thrice daily to the bites. Had the bites become infected, an antibiotic cream may also have been used.

## Discussion

Bed bugs have no respect for class. The very best hotels around the world, including here in Ontario, have an ongoing battle to ward them off. There was a time when their presence was associated with



hostels – not just for the homeless but also for budget travelers. For several years after World War II, bed bugs were virtually eliminated. This was due to the extensive use of the insecticide DDT. In fact, old documentary movies on T.V. sometimes show military trucks showering the inhabitants of all sorts of camps with DDT (the wonder bug killer) to kill lice. It took Rachael Carson's famous book *The Silent Spring* to draw the world's attention to the terrible side-effects that the chemical was having on mammals, birds, and insects.

As a result, the use and manufacture of the insecticide was banned and most countries complied. (It should be noted that, for instance, animal life in the Arctic Region still show evidence of DDT in their tissues.)

The first task in the battle against the bugs is to take time to very carefully look for proof of their presence. They are approximately 0.5 cm in size, but vary from as small as 0.2 cm to as large as an apple seed. After they have a blood meal they increase in size and are then red in color – normally they are brown. Although they have wings, they are incapable of flying. However, as noted below, they do move around!

## Action Plan

Ridding a bedroom or a home of bed bugs can be a daunting task. If you are bitten by one or more of these creatures, for instance when you are on vacation, if you are lucky you will only be left with the bite marks. The insecticides sold for home use are reported to have little effect on bed bugs and professional exterminators may have to be called in. Vacuum cleaning of bed cloths, mattresses, box springs, floor covering, drapes, cracks in the wall, including loose wallpaper, might all require repeated treatment. Clothing, as well as bed cloths, can be treated by placing them in a hot clothes drier for 30 minutes. If a washing machine is used, then only hot water (around 50 degrees centigrade) will kill bed bugs.

There is no evidence that bed bugs can transmit disease to humans, although there is evidence that they themselves can be susceptible to various diseases. JLB ❖

## Notice of By-Law Changes

Any member who wishes to make a proposal to amend the Society's By-laws must give written notice to the Board of Directors no later than **Monday, July 12, 2010**. Copies of the OSMT by-laws are available from the OSMT

office. Requests for changes can be sent to the OSMT office at 234 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 402, Toronto, ON M4P 1K5 or to the Executive Director's attention at [osmt@osmt.org](mailto:osmt@osmt.org). ❖