Oh, rats!™ may become more literal in the winter, rather than just an expression of something going wrong, as rodents look to escape colder temperatures. Rodents, such as rats and mice, can enter homes through the tiniest of holes. Mice can squeeze through a hole the size of a dime and rodents need only a quarter sized hole. Once inside, these invaders have everything they need to start breeding inside your home. First, harborage sites and possible food sources must be eliminated. Rats will use nearly any means possible to gain access to food, water and harborage. They are good climbers with excellent balance and can use wires, pipes, and even gutters to find entry points into homes. Rats are also very capable swimmers making them right at home along waterways and in sewers. There have even been reports of rats entering homes through toilets. When rats and mice frequent an area, they often leave behind clues such as droppings, urine, and gnawing damage. Other, more subtle signs can include tracks or runways, rub marks, burrows, and even sounds. These clues can be used to identify where rodents are feeding or nesting. Nests are commonly found in sheltered locations, and usually consist of continued on page 4
Macklemore, in his song “Thrift Shop” had some sage advice on thrift shopping and saving money. But, one thing he failed to mention in his popular song is to check fancy wool coats and sweaters for moth holes. Who hasn’t found little holes in their favorite cashmere cardigan or wool sportscoat? It’s common this time of year to unpack your cold weather clothes and find damage done by clothes moth larvae.

There are two kinds of clothes moths encountered in homes — the webbing clothes moth and the casemaking clothes moth. Their larvae will feed on any animal fibers containing proteins, including fur, wool and wool blends, silk, hair, feathers/ down, mohair, cashmere, and more. You could find damage (or the larvae themselves) on woolen clothing, carpets, rugs, upholstered furniture, furs, stored wool, animal bristles in hair brushes, and even woolen felts on piano keys. Synthetics or fabrics such as cotton may also be fed upon if they are blended with wool.

Damage generally occurs in hidden areas such as under collars or cuffs of clothing, in crevices of upholstered furniture, and in areas of carpeting covered by furniture. Fabrics stained by foods, drinks or perspiration, are usually more subject to damage. Clothes moths are weak flyers and are not attracted to lights. They tend to hide when disturbed, and for this reason, infestations of clothes moths are not usually noticed until damaged fabrics, furs, or feathers are found. Close examination

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**POPPIN' TAGS AT THE THRIFT STORE? WATCH OUT FOR FABRIC PESTS**

**Webbing clothes moth larva**

**Casemaking clothes moth larva**
of the objects reveals the presence of silken webs that are spun by the larvae as they begin to pupate. Because adult moths are weak flyers and not attracted to lights, they are usually found very close to the infested items, such as in dark areas of closets.

You can do a lot to prevent clothes moth damage by dry cleaning and then storing your valuable winter woolens and similar type of materials in airtight containers over the summer months. To reduce the possibility of infestations, periodically clean areas of a home that may harbor clothes moths. These areas include many seldom-cleaned spots, such as under heavy pieces of furniture, along baseboards, in cracks where hair and debris accumulate, closets, heaters and vents. The vacuum cleaner is the best tool for most of this cleaning. After using the vacuum in infested areas, promptly discard the bag in a dumpster outside.

Clothes moths may first become established on woolen garments or scraps stored for long periods. If such articles are to be saved, they should be stored properly, or periodically hung in the sun and brushed thoroughly, especially along seams and in folds and pockets. Brushing destroys eggs and exposes larvae. Larvae are strongly repelled by light and will fall from clothing when they cannot find protection. If these proactive measures do not work, then call us, and we can provide a trapping and mating disruption strategy as well as other materials known to be effective on clothes moths.

Check thrift store items carefully for insect damage. You could find damage (or the larvae themselves) on woolen clothing, carpets, rugs, upholstered furniture, furs, stored wool, animal bristles in hair brushes, and even woolen felts on piano keys.

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Active Ticks in the Winter

It’s unfortunate, but not all insects and arthropods die off in the winter like you may have hoped. Insects and ticks are cunning creatures that have adapted multiple ways to survive cold winter months. The blacklegged dog tick in particular is not killed by freezing temperatures. When temperatures are just above freezing and the ground is thawed out from snow, ticks may still be active and searching for their next blood meal.

Ticks spread a multitude of diseases, including Lyme disease, babesiosis, anaplasmosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, among others. It’s important even in wintertime to check yourself when coming indoors and to remove any ticks immediately from your body. You will want tweezers to grab the tick near the mouthparts and pull gently in an upward motion to remove the entire tick. If temperatures do begin to warm up and get above freezing and you will be spending time outside, especially in wooded areas, it’s always best to be safe and apply a tick repellent.

Indoors, brown dog ticks can reproduce and cause an infestation so it’s important to remain vigilant with pets during winter as well. Keep your pets on tick preventative medicine and

Hickory, Dickory (continued from page 1)

shredded materials such as paper, cardboard and insulation.

Rodents are dangerous pests capable of spreading dozens of diseases. When foraging, rats and mice contaminate surfaces with their droppings and urine that can spread bacteria, contaminate foods, and cause allergic reactions. Rodent bites are also a serious concern, with around 50,000 people bitten by rodents each year. These bites are most common among infants and the elderly and can spread disease or lead to secondary infection.

Overwintering rodents can also cause extensive damage to your home. Gnawing damage to electrical wires can pose a dangerous fire hazard, while chewed water lines can cause leaks or even flooding. Rats and mice also cause considerable damage to insulation through tunneling, by tearing it apart for nesting materials or due to contamination from feces.

Check your home for signs of rodent droppings, gnaw marks, scurrying noises behind walls, and an accumulation of shredded paper hidden in dark corners, indicating a nesting site. Addressing these conditions at the first signs of rodent activity is important to the success of any rodent management program. Preventing rats and mice from entering your home is also critical to avoiding an infestation. However, rodent-proofing your home is no easy task. If you do find rodent signs, the best approach is to call us to make sure rodents are quickly removed to ensure the safety and health of your family.