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Storage mites responsible for occupational allergy among farmers

We were very interested in the paper by Drs E. and S. G. O. Johansson and Dr M. van Hage-Hamsten [1] in the August 1994 issue of *Clinical and Experimental Allergy*. Their introduction, however, opens with the words 'Acarus siro, *Lepidoglyphus destructor* and *Tyrophagus putrescentiae* belong to storage mites which are common inhabitants of dust of different stored agricultural products and responsible for occupational allergy among farmers.' We would agree with this except for the inclusion of *T. putrescentiae* which, as Dr A. M. Hughes points out in her definitive work on *The Mites of Stored Food and Houses* [2], 'In the temperate climate of this country is most frequently found in large numbers in stored food with a high fat and protein content. . .'. She goes on to note that of the three species of *Tyrophagus*, *T. longior* is a cool to temperate form, *T. palmarum* a temperate species and *T. putrescentiae* is to be found in subtropical and tropical regions'. Further she states that *T. longior* is to be found on cheese in cool temperate regions' but it more commonly occurs in stored home-produced grain, hay and straw where it often increases to very large numbers by the end of autumn'. This latter is certainly our experience in Scotland and we suspect it would be a common experience in most temperate zone farms.

It appears to be common among recent investigators of mite allergy to describe the species of *Tyrophagus* found in farm stores of hay and grain as *T. putrescentiae* and to carry out their investigation on this species that has been most often found in their hay and wonder whether there is a problem of identification since the two species are so very similar in morphology. *T. longior* is said to be more heavily 'tanned' than is *T. putrescentiae* and this is very evident macroscopically when large numbers are present in barns in the autumn shortly after the harvest.

We would also draw attention to the tests we performed on a mite allergic Scottish farmer [3] which compared specific IgE titres with *T. longior* and *T. putrescentiae* monthly over a 6 month period in which the mean IgE titre for the former was found to be 8.5 compared with only 1.6 for the latter.

We should be interested in the views of other acarologists.

References

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Reply

In their letter in this issue, Drs O. D. Cuthbert and I. G. Jeffrey claim that *Tyrophagus longior* is a more common inhabitant than *T. putrescentiae* of stored grain, hay and straw in cool and temperate regions. The claim suggests that we might not have correctly identified *T. putrescentiae* in one of our recent studies [1].

In two different investigations of the mite fauna in stored hay dust on Gotland, an island in the Baltic Sea, we have found limited amounts of *Tyrophagus* spp. In October 1988 [2] we detected small numbers of *T. putrescentiae* and no *T. longior* at all while in January 1992 both *T. longior* and/or *T. putrescentiae* were present in about half of the 30 samples, but always in small or moderate numbers (unpublished). The mite species in our studies were identified by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala and the Service Centre for Taxonomic Zoology at the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm. Based on their great experience and knowledge they were not only able to distinguish between *T. longior* and *T. putrescentiae* but also between *T. palmarum* and *T. similis*, which occurred in some of the samples.

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