

IDENTIFICATION OF LICE OF DOGS AND CATS

Lice are highly host-specific, permanent ectoparasitic insects. They are flattened dorsoventrally and there are two types – sucking lice which feed on blood and chewing/biting lice which feed on skin scales and scabs; both types cause irritation and skin damage. Lice of dogs comprise one chewing louse species and a sucking/biting louse. Cats have just one louse type, a chewing type. Pediculosis affects animals in poor condition and neglect.

Trichodectes canis (below,) is a short, broad yellowish chewing louse of dogs, approx.3mm in size with a round head. This louse is the most harmful louse of dogs, being very active, moving through the coat causing severe pruritis. It is involved in the transmission of the tapeworm *Dipylidium*, serving as the intermediate host.

Lignognathus stetosus (below) is slightly larger than *Trichodectes*, with a pointed head. This louse can cause anaemia in severe infestations.

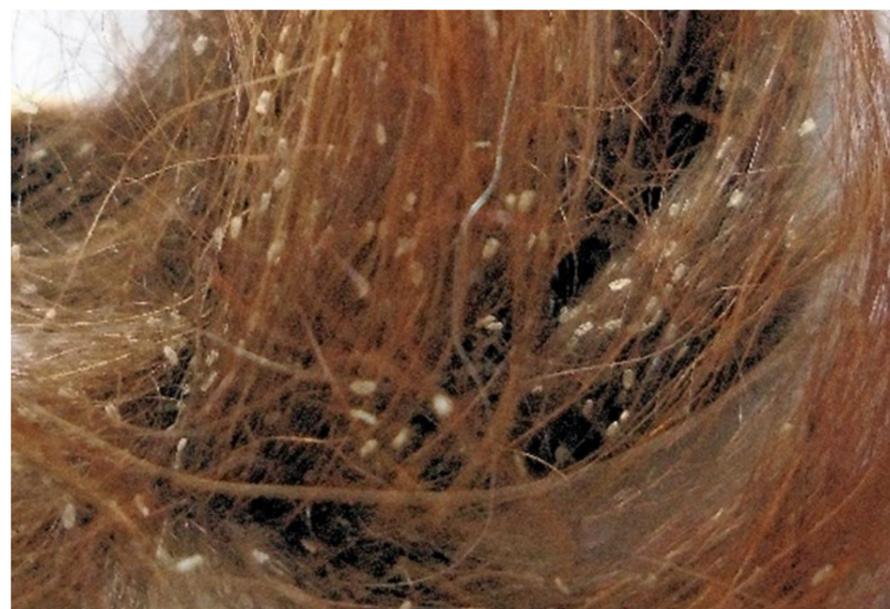
Felicola substratus, the chewing louse of cats, is distinctive and unusual in that the head is pointed and appears triangular. The image (below) shows the louse on a hair shaft, and the ventral mouthparts.



Note: Chewing lice can be distinguished from sucking/biting lice as the head of the former is approx. the same width as the body; the head of a sucking/biting louse is narrow and pointed.



The two types of lice have similar life cycles. The whitish operculate eggs are glued onto hairs (left) The egg hatches to the nymph stage. The immature stages are smaller but have a similar morphology to the adults.



Eggs can be seen with the naked eye and it is possible to distinguish old infestations where the eggs are empty and translucent, from newly laid eggs which are a pearly white.