



SPRINGTAILS AND SNOWFLEAS

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Springtails belong to the insect order Collembola, a primitive group of small wingless, soft bodied insects which possess a forked muscular structure at the tip of the abdomen that enable them to hop about in a springing action when the abdomen is arched and suddenly released. In Maine we commonly experience local outbreaks of two species which we call snowfleas that become most abundant during spring thaws when they swarm on the surface of the snow and ground. The title is misleading as they do not bite but are so named because of their ability to jump. Although colors vary in any one species, we have found that in most cases our two "snowfleas" are of consist color when swarming. The two that we encounter most often are the typical and more common snowflea, *Hypogastrura nivicola* Fitch, which is sooty or gunpowder (dull) black. Their swarms can literally blanket the surface of the snow. They may also become abundant on the ground during prolonged rainy spells in the spring or fall. The other less common species we have called the snowmelt springtail, *Hypogastrura armata* Nicolet, which is rusty or bloodmeal (dull) red. This species occurs most often along roads or trails in the spring where it too accumulates in massive numbers in and around pools of water produced by melting snows.

Springtails frequent damp or wet locations and during much of the year occur in decaying leaves, moss, or loose soil and underneath the loose bark of trees, where most species feed on microscopic fungi and algae. They occur abundantly in the moist soil, especially in woodland humus.

Control measures are not usually recommended or required. Swarms are short lived and don't last more than a few days. Swarming around foundations and doorways can be prevented by eliminating excess moisture and keeping ground level entrance areas of buildings free of rotting leaves and debris. Snowfleas or springtails are not likely to survive long in a dry indoor environment.