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Integrated Pest Management in Museums: What, Why and How?

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Abstract: This research delves deeply into the implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) within museum settings, emphasizing its crucial role in safeguarding cultural heritage. This research highlights the various factors that contribute to pest infestations, spanning from environmental factors to subpar cleaning practices, and outlines the key elements and principles of IPM, emphasizing the significance of a comprehensive approach that incorporates monitoring, risk assessment, prevention, and intervention. This also stresses the importance of collaboration, constant monitoring, and strategic planning as vital components for successful pest management in museums. Aimed at museum professionals and conservators, this research paper advocates for a sustainable and efficient approach to pest management, ensuring the enduring protection of our cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Cultural Heritage, Environmental factors, Conservators, Museum professionals.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The effective management of pests is an urgent priority for museum settings to protect irreplaceable collections, requiring meticulous effort as emphasized by the seminal 1991 work of Shaheen and Dhawan. Comprehensive interdisciplinary knowledge is essential, from cost-effective deterrents to impeccable sanitation and judicious insecticide use. Caution is vital since misusing chemicals endangers artifacts and people. This complexity prompts reducing reliance on interior pesticides. Preventative actions like storage condition optimization and exhibition alignment with preservation take priority, known as preventive conservation. As advocated by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), museum conservation is characterized by preventive actions aimed at retarding deterioration and preventing damage. Records show past insecticide risks to objects and individuals. Current practices increasingly favor less hazardous, non-chemical alternatives targeting humidity, temperature, and oxygen levels, which are critical pest management factors: geographic location and local climate influence likely pests. Climate seasonality also plays a role, with certain pests more active during specific seasons. Comprehensive pest management methods are vital to protect collections in this context. Inadequate staff education and training are often overlooked factors. Without pest identification skills or damage sign awareness, early warnings go unnoticed. Lacking pest biology/behavior knowledge causes ineffective control. Proper collection care and storage best practices are needed to minimize susceptibility. A complex environment with diverse curators, conservators, and maintenance personnel relies on integrated expertise for collection protection.

Fig. Silverfish infested manuscript.

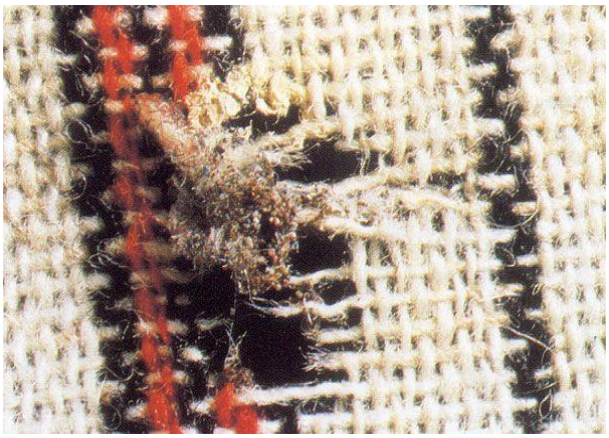

Fig. Fabric damaged by Cloth moth.

II. Definition of Integrated Pest Management in Museums.

One of the threats to heritage collections comes from pests, including insects, rodents, birds, or other animals that can potentially damage these collections. The fundamental principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) involve optimizing the use of available resources and taking a comprehensive approach to consider all aspects of operations, aiming to create an integrated strategy that prevents infestation.

In practical terms, this involves the following actions:

- Monitoring for pests.
- Deter pest activity by creating an environment that is unfavorable for them
- Applying targeted treatments based on the specific location and nature of the problem.

III. Factors of Pest Infestation in Museums.

Pest infestations pose a serious threat to the preservation of valuable collections in museums, and understanding the contributing factors is essential for effective pest management. Several key factors include:

3.1 Environmental Conditions: Environmental conditions play a complex role when it comes to preservation of valuable collection in museums and have a substantial impact on the likelihood of insect infestation. Controlling the temperature and humidity is essential. Pest activity is discouraged in museums by stable climates, although insufficient regulation leads to a variety of issues. Insects and mold prosper in settings with high humidity levels. Insects like silverfish and booklice thrive in moist settings, and pests can feed on the mold itself. Additionally, high humidity weakens organic materials like paper, textiles, and wood, increasing their vulnerability to pest damage. Materials are also harmed by excessively dry conditions because they become brittle and desiccated. Temperature variations have an impact on pest activity levels and the rate of reproduction. Because some insects reproduce faster and become more active in warmer climates—like moths and beetles—climate control is crucial to controlling insect populations. Severe cold can cause certain bugs to slow down or possibly perish. Given that certain insects are drawn to light sources, lighting also has an impact. In museums, good lighting placement is crucial since it might attract pests to sections housing collections. Ventilation is also important because inadequate air movement allows moisture and stagnant air buildup that allows pests to thrive in. Sufficient ventilation keeps moisture out of the air and deters pests.

3.2 Food Sources: While not housing traditional edible items, museums contain abundant organic materials serving as alternative pest food sources. Textiles like wool or silk contain natural fibers that insects including clothes moths, carpet beetles and silverfish find appetizing. Paper documents, books and artwork often have starch-based adhesives attracting pests such as booklice and silverfish. Wooden artifacts including sculptures, furniture or instruments can become targets for wood-boring insects like termites or powderpost beetles. Accumulated dust and debris, potentially containing organic

matter, also provide sustenance for some pests in storage or exhibition areas. Additionally, human activity residue such as food crumbs, spilled drinks or skin oils may inadvertently introduce food sources, encouraging infestations. Inadequate cleanliness produces environments pests find attractive, offering food and shelter. Structural issues from poor housekeeping like clogged drains can also create favorable conditions. In summary, while not traditional food stores, museums contain abundant organic pest food sources based on materials, human activities and housekeeping deficiencies.

3.3 Poor Housekeeping: Inadequate cleanliness and maintenance can attract pests in museums through multiple avenues. Accumulated dust and debris in storage, exhibitions or facility corners become food sources and shelters for insects and rodents. Organic materials found in dust, such as food particles or skin cells, might act as unintended insect food. Besides offering hiding places, debris accumulation helps pests avoid discovery and establish breeding grounds. Poor housekeeping might result in structural issues such as pipes that leak or clogged drains, which create an excess of moisture that draws insects. Insufficient pest exclusion through unsealed openings, cracks or crevices stemming from poor maintenance allows easy interior access for pests to infiltrate and infest collection areas. Essentially, inadequate housekeeping provides potential food and harborage while indirectly facilitating ideal pest environments through structural deficiencies. Gaps or openings in the building structure also enable effortless pest access.

3.4 Inadequate Pest Monitoring: Consistent and vigilant surveillance is necessary for early detection and action in issues related to pests, and it is the foundation of effective pest control. When museums lack comprehensive pest monitoring programs, infestations can go unnoticed until they become severe, leading to extensive damage. Pests such as insects, rodents, and others can proliferate swiftly and destroy wooden objects, manuscripts, fabrics, and antiquities irreversibly. Pest populations can grow without routine inspections and monitoring, which makes management efforts much more difficult and challenging. In addition, some pests—like carpet beetles and silverfish, for example—may be subtle in their activity, making it challenging to identify them without rigorous, continuous observation. Inadequate pest monitoring also hinders the ability to identify changes in pest behavior or patterns, which could be vital in adapting and refining pest management strategies.

3.5 Inadequate Pest Exclusion: When museums fail to implement comprehensive pest exclusion strategies, they inadvertently create opportunities for pests to infiltrate their facilities. Pests, ranging from insects and rodents to birds, can exploit any openings, cracks, crevices, or gaps in the building's structure to gain access. These vulnerabilities may include unsealed windows, doors, vents, utility conduits, or even improperly sealed storage areas. The presence of such access points allows pests to enter the museum, where they can find shelter, food, and ideal conditions for reproduction. Inadequate pest exclusion also makes it challenging to maintain a controlled indoor environment, which is a critical component of effective pest management. Moreover, the close proximity of a museum to outdoor environments or natural habitats can further exacerbate the problem, as pests from these areas may readily infiltrate the museum if not properly excluded.

3.6 Incoming Infestations: Infested items or materials can unknowingly bring pests into the museum, serving as vehicles for these intruders to infiltrate the institution. Whether it be acquisitions, donations, or even loans from other institutions or private collectors, objects entering the museum can carry hidden pests that may not be immediately apparent. Pests may have been present in the previous storage environment, or they could be introduced during transportation or storage transitions. Once inside the museum, these unnoticed pests can quickly spread and infest not only the incoming items but also the entire collection and facility. The lack of proper quarantine procedures and pest inspections for incoming objects significantly increases the vulnerability of the museum to pest infestations.

3.7 Climate: Climate plays a pivotal role as a factor contributing to pest infestation in museums, with its influence extending beyond the mere weather conditions to the broader context of environmental control. The geographic location and local climate of a museum can significantly impact the types of pests that are more likely to become problematic. Different pests thrive in different climates. For example, museums located in regions with warm, humid climates are more susceptible to pest infestations by insects like silverfish, clothes moths, and booklice, which thrive under such conditions. Similarly, areas with frequent rainfall may experience increased mold growth, which can attract pests like mold-feeding beetles and mites. On the other hand, museums in colder climates might be more susceptible to infestations by cold-tolerant pests. The

seasonality of climates also plays a role, with certain pests being more active during specific times of the year. Addressing these factors through a comprehensive Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach is imperative for protecting collections and preserving the integrity of museums.

3.8 Lack of Education and Training: The lack of education and training is an often underestimated yet significant factor contributing to pest infestation in museums, and it poses a substantial threat to the preservation of precious collections. Museums are complex environments with diverse stakeholders, including curators, conservators, and maintenance staff. When these individuals are not adequately educated or trained in pest management, they may inadvertently engage in practices that attract, exacerbate, or fail to address pest problems. For example, staff members who are not well-versed in the identification of pests or the signs of infestation may overlook early warnings, allowing pest populations to grow undetected. Similarly, a lack of knowledge about the biology and behavior of common museum pests can result in ineffective pest control efforts. In addition, without proper training in best practices for collections care and storage, artifacts may be improperly handled or stored, increasing their susceptibility to infestations.

IV. Mitigating the Risk of Infestation by Applicating the Integrated Pest Management in Museums.

4.1 Preventive Measures

- Climate control: Maintain stable temperature and humidity levels to deter many pests.
- Sealing: Seal cracks, gaps, and openings that pests can use to enter the museum.
- Screening: Use insect screens on windows and vents to prevent pests from entering.
- Storage: Store artifacts and collections in a clean and organized manner, away from walls and floors.

4.2 Regular Monitoring and Inspection.

- Conduct routine inspections to detect signs of pests or damage.
- Use sticky traps, pheromone traps, or other monitoring tools to identify and monitor pest populations.

4.3 Quarantine.

- Isolate newly acquired items or materials for a specified period to ensure they are not carrying pests.
- Monitor quarantined items for signs of infestation.

4.4 Fumigation.

- Fumigation Structural and space fumigation, applied in museums, residences, and repositories to combat damaging insect pests and protect valuable items, demands a highly skilled and knowledgeable approach. Only expert fumigators with thorough training should undertake this intricate process to ensure its effectiveness. The fumigation procedure, if not executed correctly and in accordance with product labels and instructions, can pose hazards and lead to destructive outcomes.
- Among the two structural fumigants suitable for this purpose, Vikane® (sulfuryl fluoride) is recommended due to its comparatively trouble-free nature. In contrast, Methyl bromide presents chemical characteristics that may be harmful to structures, valuables, equipment, and various art forms.

4.5 Good Housekeeping.

- Keep museum spaces clean and free from debris, dust, and food particles that can attract pests.
- Vacuum and clean storage areas regularly.

4.6 Artifact cleaning and handling.

- Clean artifacts and items before storing them to remove any residual food or pests.
- Use gloves and follow proper handling procedures to prevent transferring pests from one item to another.

4.7 Biological Control.

- Still quite new and under development is the biological method application using parasitoid wasps, for example, against biscuit beetles, webbing clothes moths, or furniture beetles. First, results show that it is working if the location of the

infestation is known and parasitoid wasps are commercially available (this is not the case for all pests, but just a small selection).

- Additionally, museums can introduce beneficial organisms like spiders that can help control pests.

4.8 Freezing.

- Exposing insects to abrupt and significant temperature variations is a widely employed method for pest control, However, it is imperative to assess the potential impact of temperature fluctuations on specimens before implementing this procedure. Some specimens can be sensitive to temperature changes, necessitating a careful evaluation of potential damage (Florian, 1986, 1989, 1990; Strang, 1992).
- For optimal results, the freezer temperature should range between -18°C to -40°C. It is recommended to utilize a deep freezer rather than a household or self-defrosting freezer. The chosen freezer should have the capacity to rapidly alter temperatures; effectiveness may be considered if this change occurs within 24 hours. Notably, if an object has been stored in a cold environment before being placed in the freezer, a gradual freezing process may occur, allowing insects to acclimatize and resist succumbing to freezing conditions. Careful consideration and adherence to these temperature-related protocols are crucial to ensuring the success of this pest control technique.

4.9 Naphthalene.

- Naphthalene remains a commonly utilized household insect repellent for controlling infestations. While it exhibits some repelling properties against adult beetles and moths at lower concentrations, a substantial concentration is necessary to exterminate these insects.
- However, employing high concentrations of naphthalene comes with drawbacks, including potential adverse effects on human health. Elevated concentrations may have detrimental impacts on both individuals and the discoloration of specimens. Moreover, the high concentration levels can dissolve the fat content of organic specimens, posing risks to their integrity.

4.10 Nitrogen Treatment.

- Nitrogen has demonstrated safety and efficacy in treating delicate stuffed natural history objects, (Reichmuth et al., 1991; Rust et al., 1996; Valentin and Preusser, 1990) utilizing anoxia to eliminate insects by excluding oxygen, creating an anaerobic environment. The treatment is straightforward, requiring oxygen levels below 0.1%, achievable in a specialized chamber or an individual bag with an oxygen barrier.
- Large specimens can be treated with nitrogen cylinders, which is more cost-effective than constructing a nitrogen chamber with absolute airtightness. Converting an existing fumigation chamber is impractical due to the added expense of sealing pipes. The cylinder and bag method, while cheaper initially, necessitates an accurate oxygen meter, proper gas cylinder storage adhering to fire safety controls, and maintaining relative humidity between 5 to 10%. Installing a dehumidifier is essential if humidity exceeds this range. The insect-killing effectiveness is also temperature-dependent, requiring temperatures of 25°C and above for two to three weeks to eliminate insects. Many museums adopt Ageless for insect management and object preservation. Comprising moist iron oxide powder in porous packets, Ageless absorbs atmospheric oxygen when enclosed in a clear, oxygen-resistant film bag around the specimens. This process forms iron oxide and hydroxide, effectively slowing the specimens' deterioration.

4.11 Camphor.

- Camphor, derived initially from tree resin and now synthesized from pinene, has served as a repellent for beetles and moths over an extended period.
- The potent effectiveness of camphor in eliminating beetles is notable at high concentrations, and its toxicity is significantly heightened at elevated levels.

Fig. 4.1 Fumigation Chamber.

Fig. 4.2 Nitrogen Anoxia Treatment.

V. Technical and Electrical Devices that May be Used in IPM.

5.1 Pavement and Embedded Sensors.

- These are the devices catch out the entry of insect pests on the floor, window and showcases.
- Embedded sensors can be installed on windows, doors and other open parts.

5.2 Digital Sensor Alarm System.

- Nowadays, different types of security alarm systems are available in market, we can modify them according to our requirement.
- Different types of alarm systems help in recognizing different species of insects.

5.3 Insect Trap Machines.

- Insect pests can be trapped by devices such as Bug zappers, UV tube insect killer machine, Sleek fly catcher, Mosquitraps etc.

VI. Conclusion.

This research demonstrates that museums must utilize integrated pest management (IPM) strategies to protect irreplaceable collections from pest damage threats. Factors like environmental conditions, food sources, poor housekeeping, insufficient monitoring and exclusion increase infestation risks. IPM principles of prevention through climate control, sealing entry points, proper storage and housekeeping along with vigilant inspection, trapping and targeted treatments provide a comprehensive, sustainable approach. Ongoing staff education ensures pest identification skills and biology awareness assist effective IPM. Though still developing, biological controls appear promising. An overarching preventative, collaborative systems perspective is essential, avoiding overdependence on toxic chemicals. With successful IPM implementation, museums can decrease pest populations, safeguard collections, and share best practices. While challenging, IPM is vital for cultural heritage preservation now and in the future.

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