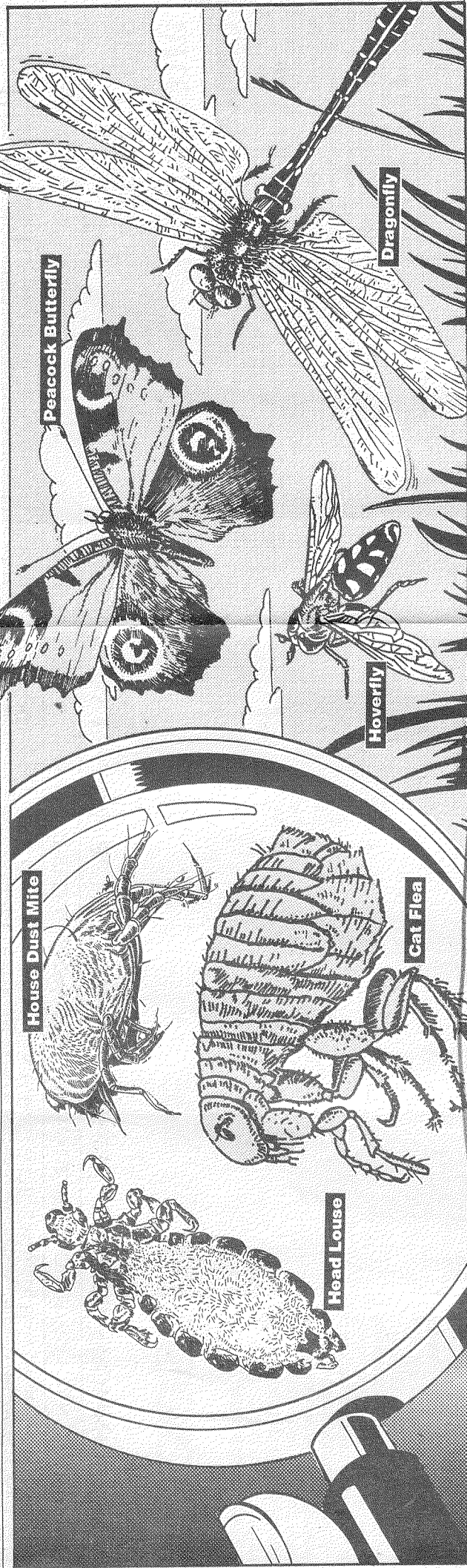


NEWS

RISK FROM EXPLOSION OF DUST MITES AS HOUSE PESTS MULTIPLY THIS SUMMER



The mites feed on skin particles and other human debris, and get their vital moisture supply topped up by the sleeper's breath. In turn, the pillow user is ideally placed to inhale both the mites and their dung, causing wheezing.

Doctors have the right idea in sending patients for holidays in Morocco or the Alps, where the air is too dry for the mites to thrive. But the trouble will start again on the first night back at home, says Dr Maunder.

He recommends that asthmatics and sufferers from dust-mite allergy should throw away old pillows that are filled with years of accumulated dung and spray replacements with Actomite, which should keep the pests at bay for a year.

embarrassed to tell them, and so they don't visit. The only person who does visit is the vicar — and he's wearing Wellington boots to avoid getting bitten — and so the owners get lonely and acquire more cats,' says Dr Maunder cheerfully.

And although the flea season is only just starting, both councils and Rentokil report soaring call-out figures from desperate home owners.

Other household pests that are thriving include cockroaches and Pharaoh ants which infest many high-rise estates and are almost impossible to dislodge because of the many hiding places where they can lurk. Ordinary ants have also proved a problem. Sales of just one treatment chemical have

risen by a third this year, and nests are on the increase.

Hazards outside the home are multiplying rapidly as well. Mosquitoes and gnats can use the smallest puddle of water for breeding and wasps are also thriving. Their peak nuisance period is likely to occur in another month, when the queens die and the workers are both hungry and at a loose end.

Head lice are another unexpected summer hazard. Roger Crow, marketing manager of Wellcome Pharmaceutical, says most children are not infected at school but by adults during the school holidays. The likeliest culprits are doting grandmothers who do not know they are infected — for some reason nits avoid adult men altogether.

It isn't just unfriendly wildlife that is benefiting from the damp summer. Hoverflies, which look like small wasps but are harmless and eat aphids, have migrated to Britain in vast numbers. Some butterflies and moths are also enjoying a good summer. One in particular, the White Letter Hairstreak, which is normally a rarity, has become commoner than the White Peacock.

Others that are doing well include the White Admiral, the Peacock, and the Holly Blue. Unusual moths include the Great Brocade, normally resident in Scandinavia but recently spotted in East Anglia, and the extremely rare Black Veined. English Nature has observed

that dragonflies are thriving but bumble bees are not so common as last summer. And ordinary householders have noticed the epidemic of woodlice (not strictly an insect but a land living shrimp) and earwigs, so called because of the shape of their wings.

Insect experts are perhaps the only humans delighted by this summer's crop of creepy-crawlies. Dr Maunder has just started his summer holidays — and he is planning to spend them observing the wildlife in his back garden.

Magnifying glass in hand, he enthused: 'I've seen some wonderful insects this year, including a scorpion fly, which is unbelievably primitive' — just like seeing a dinosaur.