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Hardiness of Anthrenus II

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You wouldn't think that the humble carpet beetle could be so difficult to prevent from eating our collections! In a former note, I outlined how its eggs survived freeze-drying, lying dormant in a pipistrelle carcass.

Once again this tiny beetle has survived efforts to prevent recurrence. A case of Shelducks and chicks from our hands-on SEARCH unit at Gosport was treated for *Anthrenus* infestation last October – the telltale larval skins were removed and the plumages checked for damage and conserved where necessary. As a preventative, some crystals of naphthalene were added inside the case before it was sealed with no gaps at all.

In May this year, the case was returned to me with a fresh outbreak – the chicks in particular had a sprinkling of adherent and bristly, brown skins! I checked the case for apertures and cracks – nothing! How did they get in there? Perhaps they were 'beamed' in star-trek-style!? I also thought that the naphthalene must have already evaporated and dissipated, but not so. As I opened the case just a crack to insert a hygrometer, I was nearly laid out by the wave of naphthalene vapour! The RH was down to 42%. There was fresh damage but not too serious, so the conservation work was repeated and the case resealed and checked.

What we can learn from this is that *Anthrenus (verbasci)*, in some stage of its life cycle, can survive –20 degrees C, a vacuum down to 0.1 atmospheres and a heavy concentration of naphthalene vapour – discouraging but at least the low RH had brought about the demise of the larvae. I will not, however, be advising anyone to store their taxidermy at low RH levels since the only effective cure is (as usual!) vigilance.