

A CLOSER LOOK AT BEHAVIOURS OF HEAD LICE (*PEDICULUS HUMANUS CAPITIS*) CHALLENGES CURRENT VIEWS ON BIOLOGY AND MEDICAL IMPORTANCE

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The current view is that there are two separate species or sub-species of *Pediculus* (*P. humanus* and *P. capitis*, or *P. humanus humanus* and *P. humanus capitis*). Although difficult to tell apart, body lice are believed to have evolved exclusive behaviours that allow life on the torso and clothing of humans. It is believed that only body lice can cause severe dermatological reactions and satisfy the conditions needed to act as vectors for the three known louse-borne pathogens (LBP) transmitted by *Pediculus*. Findings from an exploratory study into several aspects of the behaviour of head lice and their effects on the host suggest that, in optimum conditions, head lice exhibit traits in common with body lice. The results challenge views on their biology, medical importance, and the dynamics of the host-parasite relationship of *Pediculus*.