

# **ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT STATE OF SUCKING/CHEWING LOUSE (PHTHIRAPTERA) SYSTEMATICS**

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In 1758 Carolus Linnaeus described 27 species of sucking and chewing lice. Today, over 240 years later, around 5000 species are known. However it is estimated that this figure represents only about one half of the number of these insects, which parasitize only birds and some mammals. Behind these figures are some interesting developments in phthirapterology, whose main strands are here outlined and their associated problems discussed. The following aspects are dealt with in their historical context:

1. Host specificity - the chief characteristic of Phthiraptera.
2. The system of the Phthiraptera.
3. Genus concepts in sucking/chewing lice.
4. From the morphospecies to the biological and/or phylogenetic species concept.
5. Ternary nomenclature, host-specific subspecies concept, and Harrison's Rule.
6. The practicalities of species description (collections, collectors and taxonomists, type catalogues and availability of type material).
7. Checklists, faunal works, and identification literature.