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| <1114/c> | <p>It is by far the most common cause of asthma in Britain, the allergy that kills 2,000 people a year, incapacitates hundreds of thousands and costs £450 million a year in NHS prescriptions and billions in hospitalisation and time off work. ‘Ten per cent of British schoolchildren have asthma and five per cent of adults. And it has to do with bed hygiene, for you don’t become allergic to the mite - you become allergic to the mite’s dung. The droppings accumulate in old pillows and mattresses. We tend to treasure pillows down the years. But no one with any hint of asthma or allergic rhinitis should keep a pillow more than four or five years. ‘If you start with a new house and new furniture it is usually about five years before anybody can get asthma in that house: it takes that time for the mite dung deposits to build up. Instead of trying to kill house dust mites, the best things is to throw pillows away and replace them with new ones which won’t contain any allergen. Then, if you want to, you can spray the new ones with special sprays now available to stop the mites from recolonising them. ‘Doctors, who have never been taught medical entomology and don’t know what a mite is, would be far happier if asthma were caused by cigarette smoke, pollution, plant pollen or cat fur, but few cases actually are. The health ministry could have ended the problem a long time ago - it’s one of the biggest scandals in public health at the moment. In the meantime, the pharmaceutical industry naturally concentrates on selling puffers and pills, on the suppression of symptoms. ‘But it is mite dung that people become allergic to, and so the first thing to get rid of is the dung. The mite lives in carpets as well as beds, but few of us lie on the carpet for hours on end. But we do spend an average of eight hours every day of our lives with our mouths and noses pressed against pillows full of the mite dung ... ‘The author and the Editor would like to thank the scientists who helped keep these tales within the bounds of fact: entomologist Dr John Maunder and parasitologist Dr Ian Burgess, both of the University of Cambridge. TV LINK In Lifesense, new close-up filming techniques reveal lice, mites and bacteria stalking the landscape of the human body, and the world of those parasites who prefer our interiors. Also, don’t miss the blood-sucking sand tampan, which can survive for years in suspended animation as it awaits a human victim. If you think you can stomach it, watch</p> |
|  <p>Key: Footprint ConEn1 Footprint ConEn2 Footprint ConEn3</p> | <p>Life of Man</p> <p>, 9 December at 8.30pm, BBC1. AUTHOR Bill Cater is a journalist, a former assistant editor of The Sunday Times and a regular contributor to BBC WILDLIFE. Right: Botfly larvae. ‘As she was cutting away, she said ‘Goodness me, you’re absolutely right, there’s something wriggling about ...’ and pulled out this horrible, fat, bristly grub three quarters of an inch long.’ Head-part of pork tapeworm. You can tell it from a beef tapeworm by the hooks on its mouth. It’s less common than a beef tapeworm, but more dangerous, because its larvae will settle into almost any part of the body, including eyes. Once upon a time, tapeworms in general used to be the type of internal parasite that you or your listless friends were most likely to have. Nowadays, though, meat-inspection laws have made them relatively rare. (There used to be an old sailor’s trick for getting rid of tapeworms, using a raw egg with a</p> |

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| | <p>pinhole in one end. The sailor would hold the egg to his mouth and let the albumin form a string that eventually extended to the large intestine. Then ... on second thought, never mind what happened then.) Top: Botfly larva in natural habitat and, above, after eviction. 'Then, one day ... I looked in the mirror and could see a small protrusion out of the lump. I pulled at it, and out came a larva ... and I could see the mouthparts moving.' Right: Dog hookworm. 'They told me I had such a heavy infestation, all the little worms hooked on to my gut and sucking my blood, side by side, looked like velvet ... 'Above: Leeches in a blood-wallow, on a hiker's foot. 'I'd about 25 leech bites on each foot, and about 10 leeches in each boot, all absolutely full of blood.' Left: Leech on forest floor, waiting for supper. '... rain mixed with blood was everywhere. We must have lost pints.' Above: American argasid tick, full up. 'In the evening we were like a tribe of monkeys, sitting around chatting and picking ticks off one another.' Right: A tropical chiggoe flea that has burrowed into the sole of a foot, gorged itself, laid eggs and been squeezed out, having grown from less than one millimetre wide to more than a centimetre. 'The only way we could get any sleep was by drinking about a tumbler of whisky every night.' Light micrograph (ie, false colours) of an Ixodes tick, one that happens to carry Lyme disease. 'If you get a pink</p> |
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