

## Webbing on Your Oaks Caused by Barklice, aka, ‘tree cattle’: (*Archipsocus nomas*)



The webbing of these small insects can engulf large branches of trees.

Photo by: Doug Caldwell



Photo of adults by:  
Dave Shetlar

Photo of immatures  
by: Eric Paysen



This is a very appropriate Halloween bug! Maybe somebody will figure out a way to sell them so that they will decorate your trees for the occasion. *Archipsocus nomas* is a webbing barklouse and not in the true lice group. They are more closely related to the little booklice that you surprise when rummaging through old books. This is a communal web-spinning barklouse. During some years they make extensive silken webs that often cover the trunks and branches of live oaks in the southeastern U.S. The webs are believed to protect the barklice from predators. To some, the glistening webs are unsightly, but neither the barklice nor the webs will cause any harm to trees. This is referred to as a NBD, “no big deal” bug. These insects are scavengers, cleaning the bark of lichens, fungi and dead animal and plant matter. The adult barklice are brownish-black and approximately ¼ inch long. The immature stage or nymphs, are brownish-gray and resemble the adults, except they are wingless. The adults and nymphs feed in a group. When the webbing is disturbed they scatter rapidly as a group and are referred to, in the older literature, as tree cattle because of this herding behavior. There are several generations that overlap. Webbing usually becomes noticeable in July and may become more extensive through October as the colony grows in size. This insect isn’t worth spraying and maybe, if left alone, you won’t have to decorate your live oaks for Halloween!

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