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Library battles beetles to save 100,000 old books – 17th July 2025

Level 0

Beetles are eating thousands of very old books. The books are in a 1,000-year-old library in Hungary. There is a Bible from the 13th century. There are many old documents. Library staff are putting the books in large plastic bags. They removed the oxygen from the bags. After six weeks without oxygen, the beetles will die.

The insect eating the books is the drugstore beetle. It usually eats dried food, but it also likes the glue in books. Librarians saw lots of dust on bookshelves. They found holes in the books. They knew beetles were chewing through the books. A librarian was worried. She said if a book is ruined, "a piece of culture has been lost".

Level 1

Thousands of old books are in danger. Beetles are eating them. The books are in a 1,000-year-old library in Hungary. One of the books is a Bible from the 13th century. There are also hundreds of documents from before the invention of the printing press. Library staff are putting the books in large plastic bags. They removed the oxygen from the bags. After six weeks without oxygen, the beetles should be dead.

The insect eating the books is the drugstore beetle. It usually eats dried food like flour. The bugs like to eat the gelatin that is used to make glue in books. Librarians found something was wrong when they saw dust on the bookshelves. They then found holes in the books. These were from the beetles chewing through the paper. A librarian said she felt a lot of responsibility for saving the books. She said if a book is ruined, "a piece of culture has been lost".

Level 2

Tens of thousands of old books are in danger. They are being eaten by beetles. The books are hundreds of years old. They are in a library in a medieval abbey in Hungary. The abbey was founded in the year 996. One of the books is a Bible from the 13th century. There are also hundreds of documents from before the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. Library staff are putting the books in wooden boxes. The boxes are being sealed in large plastic bags. The oxygen has been removed from the bags. After six weeks without oxygen, the beetles should be dead.

The insect eating the books is the drugstore beetle. It usually eats dried food, like wheat, flour and spices. The bugs like to eat the gelatin and glue that are used to make books. Librarians understood something was wrong when they found lots of dust on the bookshelves. They also found holes in the books. These were from the beetles chewing through the paper. A librarian said: "We've never encountered such a degree of infection before." She felt a lot of responsibility for saving the books. She said if a book is ruined, "a piece of culture has been lost".

Level 3

Tens of thousands of antique books are in danger. They are being eaten by beetles. The centuries-old books are being taken off the shelves of a library in a medieval abbey in Hungary. Pannonhalma Abbey was founded in the year 996. It is four years older than the Kingdom of Hungary. One of the books in danger is a complete Bible from the 13th century. There are also hundreds of manuscripts from before the invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century. Library staff are carefully putting the books and manuscripts in wooden boxes. The boxes are being sealed in large plastic sacks. The oxygen has been removed from the sacks. After six weeks without oxygen, all of the beetles should be dead.

The insect eating the priceless books is the drugstore beetle, also known as the bread beetle. It usually feeds on dried foodstuff, like wheat, flour and spices. The bugs like to eat the gelatin and starch-based glue that are used to make books. Library workers realized something was wrong when they found lots of dust on the bookshelves. The librarians then found holes in the books. These were caused by the beetles chewing through the paper. The person in charge of getting rid of the beetles said: "We've never encountered such a degree of infection before." She explained she felt a lot of responsibility for saving the books. She said if a book is ruined, "a piece of culture has been lost".