

Telling lice finds truth

By Tom Noble

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They may look the same, but head lice - the scourge of the schoolyard - and body lice are different species.

Tests at the University of Queensland on lice gathered in China and Nepal showed the lice did not interbreed, and stayed in their favoured parts of the body.

Natalie Leo, of the university's microbiology department, told the Genetic Society of Australia's annual conference in Melbourne yesterday that tests using molecular markers - a type of DNA fingerprint - led researchers to conclude that they were different species.

"It's possible a further study could contradict my results, but all the evidence indicates they are separate species," she said.

Ms Leo said the lice looked similar, but body lice - which prefer cold climates where people rarely washed their clothes - were slightly larger.

Body lice were linked to disease, whereas head lice had never been implicated, she said.

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