

The Creepy Crawlies Are Still Invading!

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For the past few summers there has been a widespread outbreak of Tent Caterpillars across the Peace Country, with this year's drive appearing to be the most severe in many areas. Typically an outbreak in an area lasts between four to seven years, however with the delayed aspen leaf-out this spring, it appears that these creepy crawlies might devour up their food supply faster than normal. We can only hope they will starve themselves out before they begin their reproductive cycle again for next spring!



The Forest Tent Caterpillars (*Malacosoma Disstria Hübner*) larvae feed on leaves of a variety of deciduous hardwood trees, such as oaks, gums, basswood, cherry, plum and trembling aspen after emerging from their eggs. During outbreaks, large caterpillars and moths favor feeding on pine, oak, aspen trees and sugar maple. The caterpillars don't kill the trees but rather defoliate them and strip them of their leaves, making them more susceptible to other predators and diseases. After the caterpillars have stripped the trees of their leaves, they feed on wild and ornamental shrubs and even the leaves of cultivated fruits and vegetables



History

Caterpillars usually begin building their cocoon around the end of June/beginning of July, but since they are quickly running out of their food source, it is looking like this stage has already occurred in many areas. Contrary to their name, Tent Caterpillars don't actually build tents but rather spin large, conspicuous silk nests in crotches of tree branches in spring and early summer. The adult is a yellow-brown moth marked with two brown stripes with a wingspan of 2.5 to 4 centimeters. Once emerged from the pupae (10 days later), the moths mate within 24 hours and the females will then begin laying their eggs several hours later. Egg-laying takes place in July and early August and the eggs are deposited by the females on twigs of trees and are protected by a frothy cement called spumaline, which prevents the eggs from freezing over winter. One moth can lay eggs in masses up to 300 and migrate anywhere from 30 to 40 kilometers away. Yikes!!! This explains how the population has spread so quickly across the Peace Country in the past few seasons.

Hatching occurs the next year (May to July, depending on weather conditions) and a new generation of the caterpillar is born. The young larvae, migrate and as they grow they attack and defoliate trees. When they reach full growth after 5 to 8 weeks, they spin silken cocoons in which they remain in the pupae stage for about 10 days before emerging as adult moths.



EVENTS

July/August

Whole Farm Water Planning Workshop

July 5-6

Waterhole Hall

Fairview, AB

\$60/Member

\$100/Farm pair

\$75/Non-Member

\$130/Farm pair

RSVP to Morgan

@ (780) 835-6799

Keep an Eye Out For:

Kinnee Field Day:

Foliar Fertilizers and

Grasshopper control!

POSTPONED:

Agricultural Tour to

Australia moved to

November 2014

Book your spot now and start saving up!

At the end of May we said goodbye to our Extension and ASB

Project Coordinator

Karlah Rudolph out of the High Prairie office.

We wish her best of luck

in her new endeavors

back in Saskatchewan.

Is Control Necessary?

In most cases, if a tree loses more than 50 per cent of its leaves, it still will grow a second crop of leaves in about four to six weeks. This causes the tree to use up its starch reserves from the root systems earlier than normal and when repeatedly defoliated by Tent Caterpillars, the whole tree can die. However it's important to realize that Tent Caterpillar populations will increase over several years and then drop down again naturally as viruses and predators catch up with the pest population. Most environmentalists suggest you let nature run its course as natural control factors will take care of these outbreaks.

The Large Fresh Fly (Friendly Fly) is one of the biggest pests to the caterpillar as it lays its maggots on the caterpillars cocoons where they burrow through the silk and feed off the pupae. You may notice an increase in the fly population this year so farmers keep an extra look out for pink eye in your cattle this summer!

Treatments

If you are not wanting to let nature run its course the best treatment work is done when the caterpillars are larvae and are still quite young. Some preventative and active measures you can take to control Tent Caterpillars are:

Egg Removal: In the fall egg bands can be clipped from trees and disposed of. They are more visible in the fall when there are no leaves on the trees. You can throw them in a fire or soak them in soap and water.

Larvae Control: Early in the spring larvae can be physically removed from the trees and either burnt or squashed. On cool nights young caterpillars like to rest in large clusters on the tree trunks so this would be the best time to do this.

Cocoon Removal: Cocoons found on tree trunks, buildings and fences can be removed and destroyed before moths emerge in July.

Insecticides: Can be applied late May/Early June because it must be eaten by the larvae to be effective, however it is not suggested you spray unless everyone is doing so, as the caterpillars will keep coming. Pesticides also risk killing off other beneficial insects to the trees and environment.

If you are grazing cattle where there is a lot of forest growth Colin Stone, Range Management Specialist suggests delaying grazing of the forested areas that are infested by Tent Caterpillars until mid July. This will allow any defoliated areas to recover and produce more leaves. Adjustments to the carrying capacity should not be required if grazing is occurring at the recommended rates.



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