

Gypsy Moth Infestation

As we get into the heat of summer, we take advantage of the wonderful shade trees in our community. However, you may have noticed the sounds of chewing and insect droppings. These dreaded noises are the signals of a Gypsy Moth outbreak in the woods. This pest has been around with us since the 1800s, and were brought in from Europe for a failed experiment with silkworm breeding. Some adults moths escaped, and they have been with us ever since.

The larvae themselves are the source of much dismay for landowners across the United State. They spend all their time feeding on the leaves of over 300 species of trees and shrubs, and prefer oaks the most. All this feeding leads to an expected outcome: Dropping their waste in excessive amounts. Their waste, called "frass", is known to cause itching and hives, and also can leave surfaces stained a dark brown color. Thankfully, these caterpillars are not long-lived, and go from hatching to pupating in 6 to 8 weeks. Once the larvae pupate, the feeding and waste dropping will stop, as the adult moths exist solely to reproduce and lay eggs.

Biological control was introduced in the past, in order to keep the caterpillar population under control. *Entomophaga maimaiga*, a fungus imported from Japan, has shown to be quite effective at keeping Gypsy Moth at bay. In the Spring, this fungus infects the young larvae and slowly spreads through the caterpillar population. Towards the end of the caterpillar's growth, the fungus will cause the larvae to hang from the tree trunk, and cause spores to erupt around it as it dies.

This fungal pathogen has a drawback, however. In years when it is particularly dry in the Spring, and temperature remain high, the control method is less effective. In order for this fungus to do it's work, it needs plenty of water to grow and spread into the Gypsy Moth caterpillar population. This year we have seen a large outbreak in West Michigan due to the drought experienced during the Gypsy Moth's hatching season. Numerous complaints to foresters, tree services, and local government officials have been made to see what can be done about the awful symptoms of this infestation. Many worry that these pests will outright kill their trees!

While the sight may be less than pleasing, landowners can take comfort in that these outbreaks rarely ever kill fully-grown hardwood trees. It would take multiple years of total defoliation to cause that to happen. Younger trees and evergreen species that can host the pest are at much more risk, and action can be taken to protect them. The caterpillars seek shade during the day, and can be tricked into hiding under thick cloth wrapped around the trunks of trees. Any worms hiding there can be scraped into a bucket of soapy water for swift disposal. This can also be done for any egg sacs found after adults emerge later this summer. Finally, there are some sprays that are effective at killing these worms, but are best applied in the early spring as the caterpillars emerge. Look for insecticides containing active ingredient "*Bacillus thuringiensis*", which are available at most home goods stores.

If you have more questions on what you can do to help control Gypsy Moth, call District Forester Ben Savoie at 269-908-4134



This month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 8
Site Visit Acreage - 74
Private Sector Referrals - 6
Public Sector Referrals - 6
Media Occurrences - 4

Training and Events:
MI SAF Conference
MACD Virtual Conference

Open Referrals:

None available at this time, keep watch for new requests at the Barry CD website or stay tuned for more requests via email.

As always, thank you for all the work you do!



Above: Gypsy Moph larvae

