

BROWN TAIL MOTH CATERPILLAR

HEALTH & SAFETY:

- When treating the caterpillars always wear rubber gloves, eye protection and impervious protective clothing.
- Always wash clothing after dealing with caterpillars; detached hairs can weave through clothing and come into contact with the skin.
- Ladders should be used with care and must be firmly supported. It is not advisable to climb trees, this is a skilled job for qualified tree contractors.

SPRING

✿ If the preferred option of removing webs was not carried out, then the caterpillars can be sprayed. Always follow the insecticide manufacturer's instructions and dosage rates. Choose a calm day to prevent spray drift. Avoid spraying on wet days. Check treated trees after a couple of days to ensure the caterpillars have been killed: in some cases it may be necessary to re-spray. There are two types of spray;

Natural biological

✿ These are non chemical and occur naturally in the environment. They are therefore the preferred option for spraying. There are three products:

- a) Dipel
English Woodlands
Tel: 01798 867574
- b) Natures Friends
Zeneca Garden Care
Tel: 01428 645454

- c) Bio 'BT' Caterpillar Killer
Pan Britannica Industries
Tel: 01992 623691

Please note: Caterpillars have to eat and digest these products before they are affected. It can therefore take 2-5 days for the spray to take effect. A respray maybe necessary.

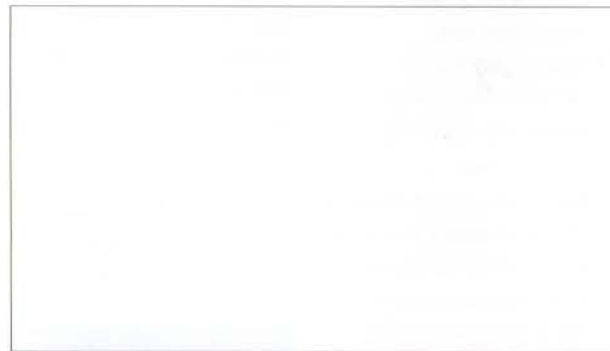
Chemical

✿ There are many insecticide products available from local garden centres/ retail outlets. Those containing permethrin and pyrethrum should give control, some include:

- Murphys Tumblebug
- Bio Sprayday: PBI
- Picket: Zeneca
- Boois Caterpillar & Whitefly Killer

- ✿ To avoid contamination of water sources do not spray near ponds, streams, etc. Where possible spray at dusk to minimise the effects on bees, butterflies and other insects.
- ✿ We can all help and work with neighbours, especially the elderly and disabled, to remove webs and co-ordinate spraying. This will benefit everyone and help save trees.
- ✿ If you feel unable to deal with the caterpillars on your own trees/shrubs, then contact your Borough Tree

Officer or Environmental Health Officer for advice on methods of control and suitable contractors for pruning out webs and spraying. Alternatively, pest control firms may be found in the Yellow Pages or Thomson Local Directory. Always ensure contractors are qualified to use insecticides and have an appropriate NPTC certificate.



The London Tree Officers Association wishes to thank Dr H. Evans (Head of Entomology, Forestry Commission Research Division) and ADAS Guildford for their help in compiling this leaflet.



For a list of approved tree consultants and tree contractors contact the Arboricultural Association on (01794 368717)

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Photo: Dr Paul Waring, Zoologist



CARING FOR THE CAPITAL'S TREES

Brown Tail Moth Caterpillar

INTRODUCTION

✿ The caterpillars of **Brown Tail Moth** (*Euproctis chryosrhoea*) attack a wide range of broadleaved trees and shrubs. Additionally, people who come into contact with these caterpillars may suffer eye and skin irritation, and asthmatics may experience breathing difficulties.

This leaflet describes the identification, life cycle and effects of this moth on both humans and trees, plus possible methods of control.

RANGE

✿ **Brown Tail Moth** occurs mainly in South East England, including the Thames Valley and London. At a local level caterpillars may spread over several gardens.

ANNUAL LIFE CYCLE & IDENTIFICATION

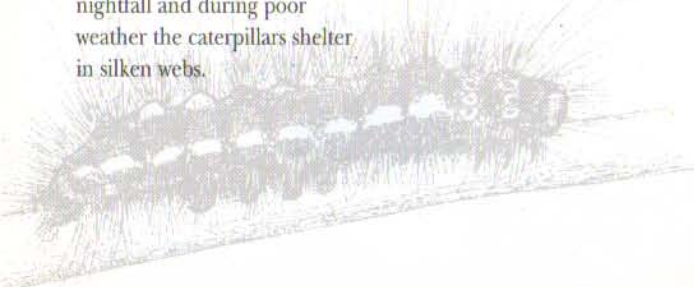
✿ In late July/August the female moth lays eggs on twigs or the underside of leaves. The eggs are covered with a thick mat of brown hairs and they hatch - as caterpillars - in mid August/early September. At nightfall and during poor weather the caterpillars shelter in silken webs.

By the autumn the caterpillars are around 20mm long. Apart from their brown colour and two small orange/red warts on the rear two segments, they have few other distinct markings.

- ✿ With the onset of winter the caterpillars stop feeding and 'hibernate' within their webs. Up to 200 individuals may overwinter in each web.
- ✿ In the spring the caterpillars emerge to feed again.

By now they are brown/black with red markings on the back and a row of white patches on either side. There are two prominent orange/red warts on the rear segments and the body is covered with long yellow/brown hairs. At this stage they are around 38mm.

- ✿ Owing to the caterpillars' voracious appetite and large numbers, it is during this time that their effect on humans and vegetation is most pronounced. Caterpillars pupate, usually in the webs, during June and emerge as adults in July to mate and restart the yearly cycle.



Brown Tail Moth Caterpillar

EFFECT ON PEOPLE

✿ The caterpillars of **Brown Tail Moth** do not bite. However, the minute, barbed hairs which cover their bodies contain a chemical which can cause skin and eye irritation. These hairs break off easily and can be dispersed by the wind. If subsequently inhaled they may cause breathing difficulties in susceptible people, eg. asthmatics.

General advice:

- Not everyone is affected by the caterpillars, however, always avoid unnecessary contact with them.
- Children may find the caterpillars fascinating; explain why they should not touch them.
- Keep windows closed which are close to caterpillars and do not hang washing out near them, as detached hairs may be blown into rooms and onto clothing. Beware, hairs may be carried indoors on pets.
- For minor skin irritations - which normally last for a few hours - bathe in warm water and apply antihistamine cream or calamine lotion. Seek medical help if eyes or throat are affected, or if skin irritation persists for more than a few hours.



EFFECT ON TREES

- ✿ The caterpillars are voracious feeders and cause more significant problems on small or young trees with fewer leaves. Such trees may be stripped of foliage within days or weeks. Frequently a new flush of leaves is produced and the affected tree can survive. However, trees may die if they suffer repeated annual attacks or are already under stress.



CONTROL

- ✿ The **Brown Tail Moth** is not listed as a public health hazard by the Department of Health. Therefore, local authorities are not obliged, or funded, to control infestations, even on private trees. However, to be considerate to residents and help contain infestations, many boroughs offer free advice and undertake some form of control on publicly owned trees.
- ✿ Control is important as firstly, **Brown Tail Moth** caterpillar infestations may easily spread from one tree or area to another and secondly, the moth has few established natural predators. Thus to contain these infestations, early identification and eradication of the caterpillar is vital.

Please note: There are a number of other web forming caterpillars which are harmless to people and play an important role in the environment. These do not need to be controlled.



The London Tree Officers Association recommends the following treatments in order of preference:

WINTER

- ✿ The most effective way to control the caterpillars is to remove and burn webs during the winter. Unlike in the months before when the caterpillars were foraging over the host plant, during the winter the majority will be sheltering in webs. Thus, removal of these webs at this stage will greatly reduce infestations of caterpillars in the following spring.

Please note: In the autumn the young caterpillars are more vulnerable to chemical treatment. However, as they frequently shelter in their protective webs they are difficult to spray.

- ✿ Method: To remove webs, prune back the branches to which they are attached to a suitable point (ie. bud/side shoot). Choose a still, calm day and handle the webs gently to avoid debris falling on to your body. Remove the webs from the host plant and destroy them, eg. by sensible incineration.