



# *The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station*

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*Putting Science to Work for Society  
Protecting Agriculture, Public Health, and the Environment*

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **GYPSY MOTH 2021 OUTBREAK IN NORTHWEST CONNECTICUT CAUSES EXTENSIVE DEFOLIATION**

**New Haven, CT** – The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) announced today that gypsy moth caterpillars (*Lymantria dispar*) have caused extensive defoliation of trees in northwest Connecticut, centered around Sharon, CT. We estimate roughly 25,000 to 30,000 acres of oak, beech, and aspen are completely defoliated with heavy defoliation of red maple and birch. Accurate documentation of the defoliation will come from our annual summer state-wide aerial forest health survey which will begin this week. This wasn't totally unexpected as our statewide 2020-2021 winter gypsy moth egg mass survey found high egg mass counts in the Sharon area, but any outbreak would depend, in part, on whether rains came at the right time for the gypsy moth fungus *Entomophaga maimagia* to kick in. Moisture is required for the fungus to infect the gypsy moth caterpillars. Spring was largely dry until the Memorial Day rains.

Christopher Martin, Director of Forestry at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, noted that in general, “partial or even complete defoliation of a tree in any one year does not mean the death of the tree. Healthy trees can tolerate some defoliation”. However, “a repeat of this level of defoliation could result in the mortality of many of these mature trees” said Station Forester Dr. Jeffrey Ward. “Spring and early summer rains in 2022 will be important in ending this outbreak” said State Entomologist Dr. Kirby Stafford. There has been some limited gypsy moth caterpillar mortality due to the fungus which is encouraging for next year.

By contrast, eastern Connecticut had widespread gypsy moth activity from 2015-2018 in conjunction with a drought which peaked at 1,175,000 acres in 2017 and ended with widespread gypsy moth fungus activity in 2018. An earlier outbreak in 2005-2006 was brought to a quick end by the fungus.

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There is only one generation of the gypsy moth each year. The caterpillars hatched from the buff-colored egg masses in late April this year. An egg mass may contain 100 to more than 1000 eggs laid in several layers. A few days after hatching, the ¼ inch long caterpillars will ascend the trees and begin to feed on new leaves. These young caterpillars deposit silk trails as they crawl and, as they drop from branches on these threads, may be distributed on the wind. Larger caterpillars generally crawl up and down tree trunks and feed mainly at night. They seek cool, shaded protective sites during the day. However, under outbreak conditions with dense populations of caterpillars, they may feed continuously day and night and crawl at any time. The caterpillars generally complete their feeding sometime around the end of June, pupate, and transform into an adult moth in about 10 to 14 days. Male moths are brown and can fly. The female moths are white and cannot fly. Each female moth will lay a single egg mass and die. These eggs will pass through the winter and larvae will hatch the following year in late April or early May.

Questions can be addressed to Dr. Kirby Stafford at (203) 974-8485, Dr. Victoria Smith at (203) 974-8474 or to Dr. Gale Ridge in our insect information office at (203) 974-8600.



Gypsy Moth Caterpillar from Northwest Connecticut. Photo credit: Katherine Dugas, CAES

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