



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

Forest Health: Forest Tent Caterpillar

In Texas, periodic and localized outbreaks of the forest tent caterpillar (*Malacosoma disstria*) may occur. They are particularly fond of the leaves of oaks and gums. The major impact from these caterpillars is slower tree growth. Larvae occasionally create a nuisance in recreational areas and urban settings.

Identification:

The adult moth is light brown with a wingspan of approximately 1¼". Forewings have one broad or two thin parallel dark brown lines across the center. Mature larvae are about 2¼" long, dark bluish with yellow lines extending along each side of the body, and keyhole or footprint-shaped white spots down the middle of the back. Pupae are reddish-brown and the silk cocoons are commonly formed in loosely rolled leaves. Eggs are laid around the twig in masses of as many as 300, covered with a dark-colored secretion that hardens into a glistening porous cover.

Signs of Attack:

Usually the first signs of attack are many defoliated trees or large amounts of falling fecal pellets. Frequently, caterpillars wander from tree to tree, and large numbers are found on the ground or clustered on the lower trunks of host trees. Numerous egg masses may be observed when other stages of the insect are absent.

Life Cycle:

The female moth lays eggs in late spring. The eggs hatch in the fall and the larvae remain in the egg mass until the next spring. Larvae attain full size in approximately one month, and then pupate in silken cocoons, usually attached to leaves of the host tree. However, they may construct co-

coons in any sheltered place including buildings, adjacent trees, and shrubbery. The pupa stage requires about two weeks and then adults emerge, mate, and lay eggs. There is one generation a year in Texas.

Control:

Predators, parasites, disease, starvation, and unfavorable weather normally bring an epidemic under control, eliminating the need for chemical controls. Insecticides may be required for shade trees, recreational areas or during continuous epidemics in valuable hardwood forests. Larvae are easily killed, particularly in early development.

Chemical Control:

Forest control: Not necessary unless infestation is severe and repeated. Spray trees by mixing 3¼ pints of 57% malathion EC with 100 gallons of water (1 tablespoon per gallon) or mix 2½ pounds of 80% sevin WP with 100 gallons of water. Shade tree control: Same as above.

