

HOME & GARDEN

Gypsy moth woes may wane

Gypsy moths may wreak havoc with Massachusetts foliage again this spring, but Franklin County may not suffer as much this year.

Edward Budnik, state Department of Environmental Management supervisor for a district including northern Worcester and eastern Franklin counties, said the infestation here is on the wane.

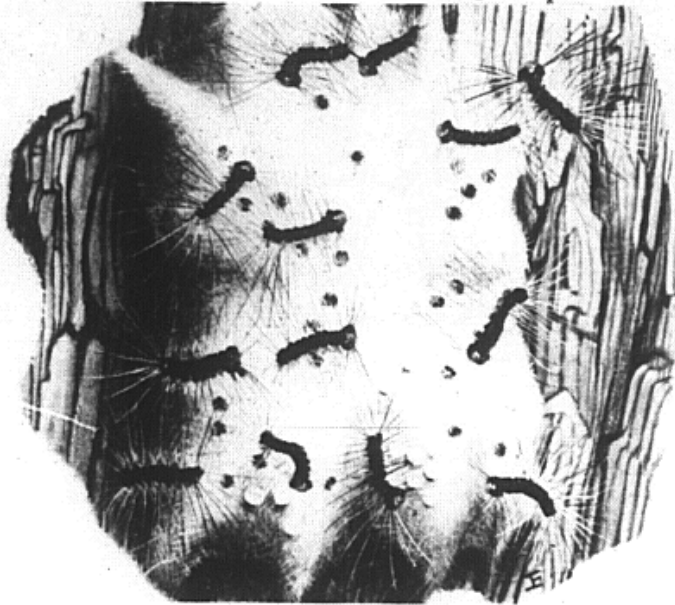
"There might be a few 'hot' spots" around the county, Budnik said, but for the most part the problem in Franklin County has run its course.

After a year or two of "building," the moth population characteristically reaches a peak before a virus sets in, reducing the numbers of the pests. The locus of the infestation shifts gradually.

The gypsy moth caterpillars, which emerge from their eggs in May, eat oak and other leaves, and can defoliate entire areas. This year, defoliation is expected to be particularly heavy in northern Worcester County and worsen along the North Shore, said Budnik. The

Orange just east of Orange, he said.

"I don't think it will be anywhere as bad in Franklin County as it was," Budnik said.



THE FIRST WARNING SIGN: gypsy moth egg masses.

GYPSEY MOTH DEFOLIATION
(in millions of acres)



Protect the honeybee

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

Ordinarily the honeybee does not instantly spring to mind when the process of food production is being considered. And certainly not by those who prefer a sizzling inch-thick steak to a plate of "rabbit food."

However, at least one-third of the food we eat is dependent on insect pollination, primarily the honeybee, before it can be harvested. Even steak eaters must remember that it has taken a mess of clover, alfalfa, trefoil and lespedeza to feed the animals. All of these forage crops are dependent on the honeybee and they make up the bulk of the diet of beef cattle, hogs, lamb and poultry.

It seems to me that the welfare of the honeybee is of concern to all of us. The honey harvested by beekeepers certainly has its value, but the main importance of the honeybee is as pollinator. Local orchardists usually bring in hives of bees at the appropriate time to insure good and complete pollination of their fruit trees. Poorly pollinated trees can mean a poor fruit set or it can mean the production of slightly misshaped fruit that will not be as attractive to the customer.

BETWEEN THE ROWS

cell of the honey comb. When the bees eat this poison they will die. And even if the poison is not eaten right away, the stored pesticide will slowly release a poison gas that will kill the bees.

The death or weakening of a hive is always a problem for a beekeeper but it is doubly so in a case like this, Bonney said, because the cause is so difficult to identify. He recounted the story of a beekeeper whose hive died because of poisoning by micro-encapsulated pesticide. Not realizing what the problem was he took parts of that contaminated hive and used them in other hives thus compounding the problem. The micro-encapsulated pesticide will break down when out in the open and lose its potency, but it will remain lethal for a much longer period when stored in honey.

Beyond the damage done to bees and thus to food production because of the use of such pesticides, some people eat bee pollen for the benefits it is supposed to give. Unfortunately, methyl-

parathion can also be harmful to humans.

There is a bill now before the state Legislature that would ban the use of micro-encapsulated pesticides and I certainly recommend that you contact your legislator and support the passage of this bill.

Forbidding the use of this kind of pesticide does not mean that one cannot do battle against the myriad of pests that draw a bead on your garden. Bacillus thuringiensis is a disease that destroys only leaf-eating moth and butterfly larvae and remains completely harmless to humans, pets, livestock — and the honey bee. BT is marketed under several trade names like Dipel, Thuricide and Biotrol. Usually it is a powder that can be mixed with water and sprayed on affected plants. It will kill tomato hornworm, inchworm, web worm, cabbage worms, loopers and the gypsy moth caterpillar.

BT is widely available, not expensive, easily used and is not dangerous to anything or anyone other than leaf-eating moths and butterfly larvae. This makes it a specific and valuable weapon for the gardener.

Micro-encapsulated pesticides are new, but Sevin has

been around for a while. Last year it was widely used against the gypsy moth caterpillar that was making our life so miserable. I cautioned an acquaintance against the use of Sevin because of the danger to honeybees, but he insisted it was all right because he always sprayed after 4 p.m. It is true that directions on many pesticides recommend their use after 4 p.m. or on a windless day, but this is to cut down the possibility of drift. With a poison-like Sevin you want to get the stuff on a determined target, not somewhere else and certainly not on yourself.

The best time to use poisons like this is early in the morning before bees are stirring.

But again there really is no need to use Sevin. Bacillus Thuringiensis is effective against the gypsy moth caterpillar and much safer. I completely understand the desire for a necessity of effective controls against pests, but safety must be the first consideration. I do not like to have poisons around. No matter how careful one can be, there is always the possibility of an accident. Children and pets are too precious to expose to that possibility.