

# NATURE NOTES

## WHO'S THAT MUNCHING ON MY TREES?

It's summer, and we have lived through the munching of tent caterpillars and inchworms. Our embattled trees are once more sending out leaves. We have one more hungry visitor to come — the fall webworm.

### Tent Caterpillars

These caterpillars are the larval stages of "Lackey" moths. In the summer the females emerge from cocoons, mate and lay egg masses that look like a dark brown collar around twigs. Each mass contains hundreds of eggs.

Early the next spring the young hatch out, just as leaf buds start to grow. The larvae have hairs on both sides of the body.

Tent caterpillars are social creatures — larvae from one egg mass stay together, travelling, feeding and resting as a group. Only in the last larval stage do they become solitary.

Mature caterpillars spin yellowish cocoons in protected places, from which the moths emerge a few weeks later. Both males and females have wings and fly.

#### Eastern Tent Caterpillar

Malacosoma americanum

- white line along back
- upon hatching, young larvae gather in a fork of the tree, and spin a silken nest
- they feed during the day, returning to nest at night, enlarging it as they grow

#### Forest Tent Caterpillar

Malacosoma disstria

- white spot on each segment
- do not build silk nests: rather they create silk pads on the tree
- social and nomadic, they travel, feed and rest as a group



Upper: Forest Tent Caterpillar  
Lower: Eastern Tent Caterpillar  
Photo: Queen's Printer Ontario

#### Did you know?

Tent caterpillars build silk trails while travelling between their nest and feeding sites on the tree.

### Cankerworms, a.k.a. "inchworms" or "loopers"

The two species of Cankerworms found in our area are part of the "Measuringworm" family. The larvae can vary from light- to brown-green or black, with no noticeable hairs. Inchworms travel by continually looping the abdomen towards the head, then releasing the head end and stretching forward.

They hatch out in spring just as the leaves begin to appear. The several larval stages feed until mid-June, when full-grown larvae drop to the ground to pupate in the soil. Wingless females cannot fly so must crawl up the trees to mate with winged males.

#### Spring Cankerworm

Paleacrita vernata

- may have one pale stripe along side; two pairs of prolegs on abdomen
- overwinter in the soil as pupae
- adults emerge in late March and April
- eggs deposited in loose clusters in bark cracks

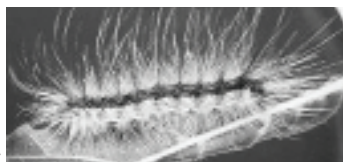
#### Fall Cankerworm

Alsophila pometaria

- may have two pale stripes on side; three pairs of prolegs on abdomen
- adults emerge from soil in fall
- eggs are glued to small twigs in neat clusters, where they overwinter



Cankerworm  
Photo: U Kentucky



Fall Webworm  
Photo: Forestry Canada

#### Who put those webs in your trees?

If the web is rather neat, and is built in spring in the forks of branches, you can blame the **eastern tent caterpillar**. If the web looks ragged and messy, and is built in the fall in the tips of branches, the culprit is the **fall webworm**.

### Fall Webworms Hyphantria cunea

Fall Webworms are larvae of a white Tiger moth. In Ontario they can be cream with dark heads or tan with red heads. Stiff white hairs extend from rows of black or orange bumps.

White, hair-covered egg masses, laid on the underside of leaves, can contain hundreds of eggs. Eggs hatch in a few weeks. The larvae spin a protective web over the branch, feeding on the leaves inside. Larger larvae may feed at night outside. The silk web is expanded as the leaves are eaten, making large messy webs covering twigs and leaves on the ends of branches.

In about six weeks the larvae are mature and drop to the ground to pupate. The pupae overwinter in a cocoon in soil or litter. Adults emerge mid- to late June.

Webworms do little real damage — the leaves have already produced the year's sugar and created next year's buds. (These buds are not eaten by the webworms!)

By Aileen Merriam