

Gypsy Moth

(*Lymantria dispar* Linnaeus)



What is it and what are the hosts?

Gypsy moth is a serious pest of trees and shrubs with a preference for oaks. Other hosts include hornbeam, beech, chestnut, birch and poplar. Outbreaks of gypsy moth larvae can result in severe defoliation, leading to reduced growth and vigour of the affected trees. In addition, the caterpillars have urticating hairs, which can cause severe allergic reactions.

Its presence in Britain

Gypsy moth has been present at low levels in a localised area of North East London since 1995, where it has been subject to an eradication campaign. In July 2005 however, a new outbreak of gypsy moth was confirmed at a suburban site in Buckinghamshire, with more than 200 male moths being captured using pheromone traps. Trapping and surveillance by the Forestry Commission is continuing at this site.



What does it look like?

Eggs and egg masses

The eggs are small (about 1 mm), button-shaped and glossy yellow-grey in colour. They are laid in batches of 50 to 800 (average 400). The egg masses are between 3–4 cm long and 1.5 to 2 cm wide, covered with numerous yellow-brown hairs, which gives them a 'spongy' appearance. They can be deposited on any firm surface (e.g. car tyres) as well as trees and wood. Egg masses may be found from September until April.



L. dispar egg mass.

Larvae (caterpillars)

The eggs usually hatch in mid-April, and the young larvae are very mobile and can be blown from tree to tree on silk 'threads'. The larvae are gregarious feeders and are usually found from April until July. The larger larvae usually feed at night and often shelter under loose bark on the trunk or under leaf litter during the day. The larvae develop through five to six moults, becoming fully-grown in about 2–3 months, when caterpillars are 4.5–7 cm long. The body is densely covered with long brown hairs and there are prominent 'warts' on the dorsal side (back): the first five pairs of warts are blue and the remaining pairs are red.



L. dispar young larvae.



L. dispar fully grown larva.

Pupae

The pupae are often found on bark where they are held in place by a few stout silk threads. Pupae are stout and blackish brown in colour with tufts of yellowish brown hairs. They are usually found in July, and the adult moths emerge after 2 to 3 weeks.

Adults

Adults occur from mid July onwards and are most often found in August and September.



The females are white, with a dark wavy pattern across the wings. Females have a wingspan of about 5 cm but are usually flightless.

***L. dispar* adult female**

The males are smaller and brown with a wingspan of 3.5 – 5 cm. Males can fly and are attracted to the sex pheromone used in pheromone traps.



***L. dispar* adult male**

The antennae are feather-like in both sexes.

When to find them?

September – April.



Eggs

April – July.



Caterpillars

July.



Pupae

August and September.



Adult Moths

Report any findings

Any suspected findings of Gypsy Moth should be reported to your local Defra Plant Health and Seeds Inspector (details of all offices can be found on the Defra website) or the PHSI HQ, York:

Tel: 01904 455174

Fax: 01904 455197

Email: planthealth.info@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.defra.gov.uk/planth/ph.htm